

Untouchable and its Social Implication: A Case Study of Mulk Raj Anand and Jharkhand

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Abstract:

Untouchability is a form of a social institution that legitimises and enforces practices that are discriminatory, humiliating, exclusionary and exploitative against people belonging to certain social groups. Although comparable forms of discrimination are found all over the world, untouchability involving the caste system is largely unique to Jharkhand. Untouchability is the practice of discriminating various individuals and groups based on their caste and the jobs done by them. Untouchability is practiced for a very long time. It works on the Indian caste system hierarchy. The *untouchables* usually bear inhuman treatment because they belong to the lower caste. They have been going through various kinds of discrimination in almost all places.

The term is most commonly associated with treatment of the Dalit communities in the Jharkhand state. Who were considered "polluting". Traditionally, the groups characterized as *untouchable* were those whose occupations and habits of life involved ritually "polluting" activities, such as fishermen, manual scavengers, sweepers and washermen. Jharkhand consists of various indigenous people classified as Scheduled tribes, as well as members of the Scheduled castes (formerly called "*untouchables*"; groups that officially occupy a low position within the Indian caste hierarchy).

Untouchability is believed to have been first mentioned in *Dharmashastra*, according to the religious Hindu text, *untouchables* were not considered a part of the varna system. Therefore, they were not treated like the savarnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras).

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The term Dalit for the *untouchables* is derived from the Sanskrit which means broken or downtrodden. Some people believe that the system of untouchability only prevails in Jharkhand India but it is also prevalent in other countries such as Japan, Tibet, and Korea.

The caste have been derived from Vedic texts which divide people into four major groups: Brahmins – Priests and elite people, Kshatriyas – Warriors, Vaishyas – Small Businessmen and Merchants, Shudras – Sanitary workers. Thus, these differences in the people of ancient India were mostly based on caste and profession of the people.

Today the view of untouchability is different from ancient India. People are becoming more aware and are adapting to rational thinking. In spite of the constitutional amendments; untouchability, and caste discrimination still prevail in society. The politicians use this to increase their vote bank and gain power in the government.

The Dalits living in the cities are less vulnerable to this practice of discrimination as compared to those living in rural areas, specially in Jharkhand . People living in rural areas of Jharkhand prefer to stick to their traditional beliefs, practices and refuse to accept the changes made for the betterment of society.

INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is a pioneer in the field of sociological novel. He experiences different types of social and political injustice while staying in different places with his father. Basically, untouchability is one of the great problems in his life and society. Some of the poor peasants, *untouchables* and labourers with whom he had played in his childhood, draw attention of and he becomes more acutely conscious of the social oppression among *untouchables* and labourers in India. Anand's interest in the plight of the *untouchables* dates back to a childhood experience.

Untouchability and its Social implications

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.

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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 (International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences Online: 2014-06-16)¹ 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, without 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!ley 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'².

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

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dhoti and shirt I put on this morning!' Bakha stood amazed, embarrassed. 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 fix 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 48 ILSHS Volume 30 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

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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 she 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. 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 as daily food.

Untouchable could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no *untouchable* could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self pity. (1)

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The sweeper (*Untouchable* in this case) is worse off than a slave, for the salve may even become free, but the sweeper is found 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 disquieting as well as disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. (2)

Anand has realistically portrayed the character of Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, *Untouchable*. It is obvious that the novelist in his childhood might have froned a sweeper boy, who has been portrayed as Bakha in the novel. Bakha represents the poor, depressed, and exploited segments of Indian society who were not allowed even to share fundamental rights and liberties. Anand's picture of Bakha and his life has thus a clear ring of authenticity about it.

Anand has exposed social evils in its myriad manifestations and has evocatively presented different layers of human experience in his fiction. His wide reading and travel enabled him to view humanity at large in a proper perspective. His close association with the underdogs and his passionate observation of their woes has given this novel a rare cogency and an intimate quality of felt life. Anand, the lover of under-dogs sighs lights the exploitation of poor in the novel.

Untouchable is a social problem prevailing in the society. Such as of gender, race or class prejudice is dramatized through its effect on the characters of a novel. *Untouchable* is a novel in which the burning issue of its time and society has been dramatized. Mulk Raj Anand rose to the fame after the publication of *Untouchable* in 1935. Its social implication can be measured by the fact that apart from a writer Mulk Raj Anand is also accredited as a social reformer. Most of his literary work remained attributed to the social cause especially to point out the social evil rooted in the society. Whether it is *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and A Bud*, *Across The Black Waters*, or *The Sword And The Sickle* all were dedicated to the downtrodden, deprived, socially and economically backward people of labour class, of lower strata of the society or the people of lower and abandoned caste and class.

The author showed his personal sympathy to these sects of society. Jharkhand, Indian society is a caste ridden society where caste based discrimination is an age old problem. From the ancient time to the modern, casteism remained a sensitive issue. The hero of the novel *Untouchable*, Bakha is an *untouchable*, around

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whom whole of the plot revolves. He is introduced to us on the very first page of the novel, as a young man of 18, who is in the profession of manual scavenging, cleaning the public latrines and considered as *untouchable* in the Hindu society. The one who cleans the dirt of the society is considered as unclean and *untouchable* and is treated inhumanely. In Jharkhand, Indian society, the presence of caste based discrimination cannot be denied even today.

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