

# **The Interminable Suffering and Physical and Mental Anguish of the Untouchables in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Untouchable* is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel and it brought him an enormous reputation and position. This novel illustrates a realistic depiction of society. In this novel, Anand has exposed an image of an untouchable who is a sweeper boy. This character is an agent of all down trodden people in pre-independence of India. With Bakha, the central character, there are other characters who also suffer because of their lower caste. The present paper of mine is concerned with the evils of untouchability and the need for innate empathy.

## **KEYWORDS**

Discrimination; *Untouchable*; Bakha; Suffering.

## **Introduction**

From time immemorial, Caste has been an overriding subject in India. Even after completing so many years of independence the ruthless, savage custom of untouchability still prevails almost everywhere in the country. Mulk Raj Anand was a renowned Indian writer in English, outstanding for his portrayal of the lives of the poorer castes in conventional Indian society. He has to his acclaim sixteen novels, twelve collections of short stories and more than twenty-five books on art and other wide-ranging subjects and hundreds of articles.

## **His themes and style of writing**

Mulk Raj Anand is Dickensian in his ultra-sensitivity to the existence of social evils in variable forms. In fact, it is the

intense alertness of the human predicament that boosted him into inventive writing. Therefore, the themes which Anand has preferred for his novels are based on such problems as castism and human agony caused by a mixture of factors-political, economic, social and cultural. He tries to produce in the readers a vital wakefulness of the dehumanizing, social evils, to swirl the springs of affection in them and to stimulate them for the elimination of these evils in order that a desirable, just social order may come into organism.

Anand's debut novel *Untouchable* has brought him gigantic fame that shows the down-to-earth picture of the society of the nineteen thirties during which the Indian struggle for Independence was at its pinnacle. The readers will realize the

disgrace and physical as well as mental agonies of the untouchables throughout the novel. It was very heart-rending to know that the so-called upper castes have not even accepted the lower castes with equality. In this novel, Anand succeeded in divulging the repression, inequality, and mistreatment suffered by the whole hamlet of the outcastes in India.

### **Despondent environment of Untouchables**

Untouchable takes place in the very first novel written by Mulk Raj Anand was under the profound influence of Mahatma Gandhi. Amid Bakha, the central character, there are other characters who also suffer because of their inferior status in society. For the fortunate, the colony of untouchables is taboo. That is why it is termed as out-castes colony. It discloses that fortunate people are totally uncaring of the welfare of the people who slavishly serve them. They treat the outcastes as their portable yet unassailable, possessions. They regard the sweepers as grimy just because they clean their dirt. They make the untouchable lead a life of total reliance on them. Even for water, the basic requirement of human existence, the sweepers have to depend on the clemency of the high-caste Hindus.

Bakha represents the exploitation and domination which has been the destiny of untouchables like him. The novel portrays a single day in the life of Bakha; the untouchable fit into the scavenger caste, generally known as *bhangi* in many Indian languages. The work of this caste was to clean toilets and streets and keeps them clean for the upper castes. The living conditions of the untouchables were awfully filthy and they were strained to live in kutch mud-walled, single-roomed cottages. There was not appropriate system of drainage and there was a stinking smell everywhere. Almost every page of the novel is soaked in Bakha's invisible tears that tolerantly bear the most

embarrassing and disheartening days of his youthful life in this story. From daybreak on he is forced to deal with inequity, detestation and insincerity. Bakha starts his daily regular work with his father's surge of maltreatment: "Get up, ohe, you Bakhya, Ohe son of pig! ..... Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten"

### **The quandary and mental distress of outcastes**

Bakha is a very nifty workman. Passersby often wondered at his ability and thought for a while that he was not the kind of man who ought to be cleaning public latrines. Despite Bakha's skill and work ethic he was no chance of moving up in his life. He is eternally restricted to his duty, debasing job as he has taken birth in a downtrodden class. Bakha's potentialities are restricted and curtailed before they can even sprout. In spite of his ardent desire to go to school and by being educated, he is not allowed to school because the parents of the high castes' children would not permit their sons to be infected by the touch of the low-caste man's son. Bakha worked in the quarters of a British troop and was wedged by the allure of the white man's life.

He is all excited and has his own set of imaginings. His dreams differ from to dress like a 'Tommie' (Englishman) in 'fashun' to play Hockey. On the other hand, his inadequate earnings and the conditions vigour him to literally beg for food and get shamed at each turn of the road. They were not endorsed even to fetch water from a well and had to remain for hours for the leniency of the upper caste. The food will be given to them by tossing and if they touch anybody by mishap they will be reprimanded. The upper class however doesn't find this untouchability when they assault their teen girls. More disgrace is in store for Bakha before his day is out. His inquisitiveness takes him to a local temple, and he becomes curious to see the concealed mystery in the temple. While

Bakha was peering through the window he was interrupted by the priest shouting Polluted! Polluted! Meanwhile, the multitude assembled and yelled at him by saying: "Get off the steps you scavenger! Off with you! You have tainted our whole service!"

Bakha ran down to the patio where his sister Sohini was waiting. Here he got a shock again as the priest stated: "I have been defiled by contact". Sohini with a snivel and tears in her eyes described the priest's claim saying: "That man made suggestions to me, when I was cleaning the lavatory of his house there. And when I shrieked, he came out shouting that he had been defiled". Though Bakha's eyes blazed wild and red and was infuriated by this and flew into a rant, he remains as a speechless witness. He dreadfully comes and tells his father: "They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt".

### **The brutal dealing meted out to Untouchables**

The circumstances which the untouchables are imposed into are really shocking though one can split their twinge and anguish. Cigarettes are thrown at him as a bone is tossed at an adamant sniffing dog. Jilebi's are thrown at him, like the wastes thrown at a pig; and the thin paper-like pancake flies down to him like a kite from the third floor. Wherever Bakha goes, he is disparaged with such words as defiled and polluted. The honoured castes Hindus affirm their dominance over the outcastes by inflicting pain on them.

*Dogs* is the name that usually comes to the mind of the privileged folk to spot the outcastes. The *touching incident* exposes the revulsion of being invulnerable. The people who gather

around Bakha shoot abuses by calling him, *low-caste vermin, swine, dog, brute, son of a bitch, offspring of a pig* etc. These insulting words unnerved on a forlorn and powerless person are in hostility to the privileged folk's claim of being *twice-born*. These words reveal their infected mind. The story goes on to show even more examples of the harsh conduct of untouchables.

### **Conclusion**

All these events expose how unfairly the untouchables are treated by privileged Hindus. Anand concludes the novel *Untouchable* with a message of faith and idealism. The patent appeal in the novel is for the total eradication of untouchability. Bakha ardently hopes for the dawn to the nature of his work and his significance in a society devoid of the label of untouchable. The ruthless dealing meted out to Bakha in *Untouchable* could have ensued to a social outcaste during the colonial days in India; perhaps such cruelties are being continued in many parts of villages even today which the objective newspapers publish. Unquestionably, Anand had haggard upon what he had himself seen and heard as a youth, he turned out in the form of a novel. As a novelist addressing himself with the task of revealing social evils, Anand has been an effectual writer and he can be measured up to Dickens in this respect. The novel evokes in the mind of the objective reader, the appalling social malady that existed in the colonial days and the succeeding decades making a tale of socially created wretchedness to the downtrodden in the Indian society. Anand dreamt for our sturdy, cohesive, affluent and undisturbed nation.

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