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## Resilience of Caste in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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### **Abstract:**

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the greatest novelists in India. Anand's first novel "Untouchable" brought him great popularity and fame. Bakha is the protagonist of the novel and representative of the downtrodden people. Anand portrayed the reality of Indian scenario of patheticism. In "Untouchable" novel Bakha is an untouchable, he became a unique individual to exhibit the oppression, injustice, humiliation to the whole community of the outcastes in India. Like Dickens, Anand pictured the certain evils and dogmas which are existing in the Indian society. In Untouchable novel the evil is caste. Bakha's agony illustrates the downtrodden people inner conflict. He exposes gender abuse through Sohini and Pandit Kalinath's episode. It relates the exploitation, oppression of the lower caste in India.

**Keywords: Oppression, exploitation, downtrodden, gender abuse.**

India is a democratic nation and is hailed as its richness of culture, tradition and religions which can be summed up as unity in diversity but there are some taboos which act as stigma in the progression of the country's fame. One among such adverse taboos is the caste system, a defining discourse forming a hierarchical order in the society. According to M.K. Naik, "Indian English Literature evolved as an amalgamation of stagnant language of Britain with chaotic India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>1</sup>

In the pre Independence era so many English writers showed the consistency of purpose in writing novels about India. In this context to some extent two Indian writers put their efforts. Bengali novelist Bakim Chandra Chattopadhyay was the pioneer of Indian novel. During that period nobody composed novels in English, but the first innovator who experimented in English is none other than Anand.

In Indo- Anglian trio R.K. Narayan was prominent in Humour, Raja Rao usage of philosophy in his novel *Kantapura* brought fame for him. Anand handled the themes of dogmas and the sufferings of the downtrodden. Dalits form a marginalized group of people who are adversely treated as untouchables and lesser human beings by the upper caste people. Anand's social responsibility created rapport between Anand and Gandhi.

Anand exchanged letters with Gandhi and returned to India adhered to the Gandhian's principles. Anand treated Gandhi as New harbinger, messiah of the society. Anand is primarily an idealist. Since his childhood, there has been an uncompromising and active revolt against any

form of irrationality or inhumanity. His early inspiration from his mother to practise the art of questioning and knowing things only by logic and convincing facts is the basis of his creative and intellectual vision.

Of all the novels of Anand, *Untouchable* (1935) is the most compact and artistically satisfying. Though it is the shortest novel of all the novels of Anand, it is the most revealing and rewarding of the lot. The unities are admirably preserved as in a classical play. *Untouchable* covers events of a single day's experience of low caste boy, Bulashah. The eighteen year old boy is one of the sons of Lakha, the Jemadar of the sweepers of the town and cantonment. Bakha is a child of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the impact of new influences causes stirrings within him. He secures a pair of breeches from a Tommy and from a sepoy a pair of boots. He is a victim of three incidents. In all these instances, Anand has drawn him with a great passion and purpose. With all the cruelty of system, he has enough heroic grandeur.

The opening paragraph of the novel epitomizes the big divide between the untouchables and other resident communication carriers, the grass cutters, and other castes from Hindu society."

*Untouchable* reveals the evil of untouchability in Hindu society. Anand describes the pathetic conditions of the untouchables through the character Bakha, their inimitable hardships, physical and mental agonies almost with the meticulous skill of historical raconteur. In the words of Marlene Fisher:

"Anand's first novel, then, is at one and the same time a fine piece of creative work in terms of its own artistic integrity and an indication of its author's humanist commitments and future novelistic directions."<sup>3</sup>

Like Anand's other protagonists, Bakha too is victim of isolation. He is socially and emotionally excluded from the rest of the society. As an untouchable, he has to live in the outcastes colony on the outskirts of the town. For the reason of his caste he does not qualify to go to a school. He is insulted, cheated and exploited because of his caste. Interestingly, he cannot marry another untouchable girl from washerman's community because among the untouchable castes his is the lower caste. At home, his own father does not approve of Bakha's modern views and supposedly unconventional thinking.

The temple episode projects Bakha's indignation. He is irritated and provoked by the hypocrisy of the priest who falsely accuses Sohini of polluting him. His fists are clenched when his sister reveals the indecent advances of the priest on her. He no longer lies down submissively. The proposed outrage on his sister's modesty enrages him. Bakha, the mild, suddenly becomes Bakha, the wild.

Structurally, Anand makes a judicious arrangement of the various episodes that occur in a single day in the Bakha's life. Bakha's day is made up of an admixture of series of incidents, some sad and some happy to render his varying responses. The first major

incident that brings realization to Bakha about his real position in the society takes place in the streets of the small town of Bullandshahr. Bakha involves in enjoying the jalebis brought from the sweet vendor who has betrayed him, Bakha inadvertently touches a Hindu, an upper caste one, who passes by. He calls Bakha vermin, dog, bitch, swine and such. Bakha is too stunned to speak out a word. "He stood amazed, embarrassed. He was deaf and dumb. His senses were paralysed only fear gripped his soul, fear and humility and servility. Instantly, he joins his two hands apologetically and meekly says, "I have erred now, I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again!"

The "Untouchables" were not permitted from using wells, ponds, and other public facilities for fear of ritual pollution on the part of caste Hindus, in British India. It became a burning topic and led to dalit revolt in various parts of the country. Significantly, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar started a Satyagraha in 1927, to secure the rights of dalits to get water from a public tank in Mahad and won the ensuing legal battle in Bombay High court in 1937.

Anand's hero is not of the race, not of the time and the place, but exemplifies all humanity caught in contingencies of an antiquated social order that impedes his evaluation into a self-consistent social life.

"Bakha is one of those millions who crawl and creep and exist almost anonymously."4

Bakha in *Untouchable* is much more complex character than Munoo, the protagonist in the novel *Coolie*. He is not passive or static. At the end of the novel, Anand offers the alternatives for Bakha in a threefold approach. Colonel Hutchinson's attempt to convert into Christianity. Bakha needs no theology at the stage but needs sympathy, dignity and identity. Thus conversion to Christianity does not appeal to Bakha as an effective solution to his tragedy. Gandhi's arrival and speech attracts him. He delivers a speech on untouchability. It does not give solution to untouchability. The talk between young poet, Iqbal and a semi-educated Babu mentions about the flush machine. Bakha's hope lies in the applied science and technology.

Humanism is at the centre of Mulk Raj Anand's fictional art. He has drawn humanistic vision from the East and West. Compassion is the compelling motive in his humanistic vision. Mulk Raj Anand is a realist. Most of his themes are woven around the social process. His novels depict about the deprived people, who are exploited in that period. He presents the predicament of the oppressed and the oppressors with commendable impartiality. He exposes the sociological problem through stream of consciousness of a single individual.

*Untouchable* focuses reader's attention on the outcasts of society and portrays their feelings with realism. At that time Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao appeared on the

literary horizon, dealt chiefly with the upper and middle classes. It was Anand who devoted the entire novel for the cause of downtrodden upliftment.

By using Bakha character, Mulk Raj Anand presented a universal figure who symbolizes the injustice, humiliation and oppression which have been the lot of the untouchables in a tradition bound society. Some critics raised a point related to Anand's treatment of untouchability. It is only a piece of propaganda and not literature. Like Bernard Shaw, Anand believes that literature ought to deal with the live problems of society. Anand tries to explain about the purpose of literature. His purpose is to lighten the burden of man in the society and make him a nobler, better, happier individual. Every individual possesses self respect, confidence, he tries to bring out injustice in the society. However, Anand achieved the goal of universal humanity on the Indian soil.

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