

**Caste as a Stigma and Untouchability as a Curse:**

**Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable***

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**Abstract**

Mulk Raj Anand is considered one of the top-most writers from India. He is one of the founding figures of the Indian Writing in English. Apart from him Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are also the initial pillars of Indian writing in English. Mulk Raj Anand's place is not less than other writers of India. He can be called the messiah of the underdogs. So far as his works are concerned, he has written many books. He was born in Peshawar which is presently in Pakistan. He got his education from Khalsa College, Amritsar and after that he went to England for his higher studies. He went to the University College, London and associated with many writers of The Bloomsbury Group. Present paper is a humble attempt to analyse the issue of caste and untouchability in Mulk Raj Anand's novel and the impact of them on the untouchable society. Bakha remains the most degraded character of this novel because he suffers the tyranny and oppression not only by the outsiders but also by his own family. His father's cruel treatment and the economical conditions of his family make his life miserable. His sister Sohini also aggravates his problems. Thus, Bakha's one day life has been the main concern of this paper.

**Keywords**

Untouchability, Caste Discrimination, Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, Stigma.  
Suppression, Subjugation, Upper Caste People.

Caste discrimination is one of the most serious social evil in India. In ancient times, different forms of untouchability were in practice. Then the society was divided into four varnas i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. This society was divided on the best basis of nature of their works. According to Manusmriti, Brahmins were born from Brahma's mouth, Kshatriyas from the shoulders, Vaishyas from the stomach and Shudra were born from the feet of Brahma. That's why their place is

shown at the bottom level. The duty of the Brahmins was to teach the society, Kshatriyas duty was to protect the people, Vaishyas handled all the trades and Shudras had to do all manual services which were not done by the upper caste people.

Thus, the society was divided into four parts and this division was to put harmony society. It was a good practice but with the passage of time, the lower caste people also started getting education. The people of the upper caste were doing their duties efficiently and they were satisfied by their work and their place in the social hierarchy. But the Shudras were exploited to the maximum extent and they started raising their voice against the discrimination and injustice meted out to them. Dalit awareness gave birth to several dalit writers to narrate their pains. Non-dalit writers also started taking interest and wrote their pains through their works.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* is based on the issues of caste discrimination. This novel was published in 1935. Its foreword has been written by a great personality Edward Morgan Forster. Anand's novel *Coolie* was published in 1936 and this novel is based on the class struggle. Another novella *The Road* that was published in 1961 also has resemblance with the novel *untouchable*.

Mulk Raj Anand novel *Untouchable* is about a low-caste boy Bakha, his sister Sohini and his father Lakha. He is the victim of the caste discrimination as well he is the victim of the patriarchal pressure. His father Lakha does not allow him to take any rest and he keeps assigning him the duty to clean the latrines. This is how his morning begins with the hue and cry of his father, Lakha, "Get up, ohe, you Bakhya, you son of pig", came his father's voice, sure as a bullet to its target, from the midst of a broken, jarring, interrupted snore" (Anand 05).

The novel is set in the fictional town of Bullah Shah. This novel has written about the low caste people, who are not allowed to touch anything that belongs to the upper caste people. These upper caste people get all of their works done by these low-cost people. There is a strange thing about this novel that this novel is about the single day story of its main character Bakha. He is a very intelligent eighteen years old boy. After the death of his mother, he had to do many household chores.

When his mother died and the burden of looking after the family fell on him, there was no time left to look for such comforts and luxuries as an early morning tumblerful of tea. (Anand 5)

His sister Sohini also helps him in some works. Lakha does not treat her well. She had to do many works in her home. He does not give much importance to her. Sohini faces many problems in her life but her father does not try to understand her problem. These lines better describe Bakha's family conditions:

Bakha thought of the uncongeniality of his home as he lay half awake in the morning of an autumn day, covered by a worn out, greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet which was spread on the floor in a corner of the twelve feet by five, dank, dingy, one roomed mud-house. (2)

One day Bakha comes from the work and he was thirsty. He asked water from Sohini but unfortunately, there was no water in the home. Sohini goes to bring water from the well. Water taking seen also is an important turning point in this novel. Through this novel, Mulk Raj Anand has tried to depict that the low caste people are not allowed to touch the bucket of the well. There were separate wells for the upper caste people and the low caste people are not allowed to touch the bucket. They had to wait for some upper caste person to come and pull water for them. When Sohini goes to well, she saw a long line there and many dalit women were waiting for their turn. It was a strange thing that there was no any upper caste person on the well to pull water for them. The low caste women were waiting for somebody to come. A person comes but he denies. Then Pandit Kali Nath comes and he agrees to pull water for them. In fact, he does not do it by having pity on the low-caste women; instead he does so hoping that it will help him cure his chronic constipation.

Raj Anand height try to attack how the upper caste people would try to molest the low-caste women. In this novel also, pandit Kali Nath hatches a plan to molest innocent Sohini because she is a beautiful girl. Sohini could not understand why Pandit Kali Nath was helping her. Pandit tells her to come to his temple to clean his latrines. The next day, Sohini takes permission from her father. When she was doing her work, Pandit comes from behind and catches her from the back. Sohini immediately understands that Pandit's intentions are not good and she starts crying loudly.

Bakha was also working nearby the temple at that time. he comes running to see what is happening there. Bakha becomes angry to know everything. He was about to hit Pandit Kali Nath.

On the other hand, Pandit Kali Nath was mentally prepared for this situation. He had already devised his plan. He solved his problem immediately saying that Sohini was trying to defile him. All the upper caste people take the favour of Pandit. Nobody tries to understand the problem of Bakha and his sister. Sohini now understands the situation. She thinks that now situation is out of her control. She convinces her brother to spare Bakha. She also knows her limitations. Bakha also knew that that he belongs to a low caste but he decides that he will not spare him. That is why he takes the route back to his home at that time.

On the way, Bakha thinks about the beauty of his sister Sohini. He thinks that her beauty has become a curse to her. Sohini's beauty has attracted the attention of Pandit Kali Nath. He thinks that everything positive is associated only with the upper caste people.

There is another incidence in this novel in which Sohini has a bad experience. When Sohini goes to fetch water, there was a woman Gulabo who was also there. She was also beautiful in her youth and she compares her beauty with Sohini. She starts abusing Sohini when the latter was sitting silently near the well. Sohini was sitting silent. G.S. Balrama Gupta comments about this novel:

A strong believer in the dignity of man of equality of all men, Anand is naturally shocked by the inhuman way the untouchables are treated by those that belong to superior caste-especially the Brahmins of the so-called twice born. (Gupta 15)

Through the character of Bakha, Mulk Raj Anand has attacked on the untouchability and the caste discrimination. When Bakha goes in the streets, he has to pronounce that an untouchable is coming so that the upper caste people may pass from a safe distance from him. Even a slight touch can pollute them and they have had to take bath to purify them.

Bakha has ambitions in his life. He wanted to become an affluent person like others. He had also passion to wear nice dresses but he was helpless. One day Bakha talks with some upper caste boys. when they come to know about his caste, they beat him severely. There was a huge crowd who was looking at them but nobody stops them. Mulk Raj Anand could not marry a low caste girl he was a poor boy video the girl also. Not only this, he is not an able to marry a girl he loved because he was poor. Dr Archana Biswas comments about Bakha:

The onward journey of Bakha from self-allocation to reconciliation in a society of the discompassionate is aptly drafted out in successive episodes. Anand follows the “stream of consciousness” technique of James Joyce to portray a day’s activities of Bakha, the sweeper boy, along with the abuses he receives from the untouchable society of power-mongers. (Biswas 1)

Bakha gets good treatment from Havildar Charat Singh who was a good hockey player and he invites Bakha to play with him. He is not like other people who are caste conscious. He behaves very tenderly with Bakha. Another good person who behaves very well with him is Colonel Hutchinson whom he meets when he leaves his home by getting irritated by his father. Colonel treats him very nicely. When Bakha calls him sahib, he says that there is no need to call him sahib. According to Colonel Hutchinson all the man in the world are equal. There is nobody big or small. All people are equal in the eyes of God. Later Bakha comes to know that Colonel Hutchinson’s wife does not like to see her husband with a cow caste boy. When there is quarrel between Hutchinson and his wife, he silently leaves that place.

Bakha comes to know at the railway station that mahatma Gandhi is coming to deliver his speech. Bakha listens to Mahatma Gandhi’s speech with much interest and he is filled with hope that untouchability will vanish in future. Without any second thought, Bakha reaches his home and he shares this information with his father Lakha. The novel ends her and it beautifully narrates the story of Bakha’s life

From all discussion above, one thing is clear that this novel is a magnum opus by Mulk Raj Anand. The novel has been written keeping in view the social milieu of that time. Many social problems have been highlighted in the novel and he tries to depict the real conditions and the difficulties faced by the low caste people. Despite of development in the Science and Technology, the stigma of the cast sill follows the low caste people. Dr V. Nagarajan and Dr. F. Vincent Rajasekar write about this novel:

The novel portrays the social evils of high caste community and the innocent behaviour of the untouchables. It focuses on many social evils prevalent in the society and the cruel caste system prevalent in India. Mulk Raj Anand has thrown light on the tyranny of the upper caste Hindus and the physical and psychological tortures of Dalits. (103)

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