



## "UNTOUCHABLE" BY MULK RAJ ANAND: A TRUE REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Dr. ARUN KATARA

Assistant Professor, Department of English,  
O.F.K. Government College, Jabalpur (M. P.)

E-mail: [arunjkatar@gmail.com](mailto:arunjkatar@gmail.com)

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Dr. ARUN KATARA

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### Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand is a legendary and towering personality in the sphere of Indian English Literature. He is well known for realistically portraying his characters because of his firsthand knowledge of the scenes and situations portrayed in his novels. "Untouchable" is a novel that has earned tremendous popularity not only in India but also all over the world. It depicts a true and clear picture of Indian society specifically the condition of the society prior to Indian Independence, where the condition of the untouchable of the subalterns was very pathetic because of their marginalized status. Mulk Raj Anand is popularly known as a novelist of the lowly and the marginalized. He has portrayed the anguish along with the sufferings of the low caste protagonist Bakha in this book, who is the target of constant abuse and humiliation at the hands of the purported protectors of Indian society. The book tells the story of the oppressed in Indian culture, socially engineered to suffer, and brings up images of the terrible social ills that pervaded the country throughout the colonial era and the decades that followed.

**Keywords:** Caste System, Discrimination, Downtrodden, Oppressed, Marginalized, Untouchability

Among the Indian English writers whose career spanned almost forty years, Mulk Raj Anand is one to be proud of. He possesses a unique talent for realistically capturing the dismal and depressing circumstances faced by the lower classes. His novels are filled with concerned observations about the individuals and environments he has firsthand knowledge of. He has an acute sense of reality as well as a delicate, creative grasp of Indian civilization in all of its aspects. Since his novels paint a true picture of rural India, they are accurate records of the modern social structure. He writes stories about

his obligation to society, especially to the disadvantaged, the marginalized, and the underprivileged who suffer at the command of colonial rulers and traditional Hindu upper-class members since he respects humanity. His accurate description as well as realistic portrayal of the dominant orthodox Hindu society are very helpful in changing the community for the better.

Mulk Raj Anand was born on 12<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1905, in Peshawar, Pakistan. He studied in Cambridge, London, and Lahore before graduating with a degree in philosophy. He is the recipient of many prestigious

awards – Padma Bhushan, The Sahitya Academy Award, and the International Peace Prize. With the transfer of his father's regiment in the army, he moved from one place to another, gained new experiences about Indian as well as European society, and from his peasant mother derived compassion for the lowly and the poor people. His most popular novels are "*Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and The Sickle* (1942), *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* (1943), *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) and *The Death of a Hero* (1963)". His famous works reveal his fundamental empathy for the troubled, as well as the individuals he chooses to write about are mirror images of the people in his surroundings. He was a remarkable artist who realistically and poignantly portrayed the life of impoverished Indians, adding a dash of moral and political devotion. As the son of the land, he wrote novels about the common people—the impoverished, the orphaned, the untouchables, and the wretched laborers who lived in villages. "Anand has a deep concern for the low caste people of India and his novels throw light on the existing sorrows and sufferings of the downtrodden," observes eminent Indian critic Pramod Kumar Singh, with good reason. His books create vivid portraits of traditional Hindu society, emphasizing the impoverished state of the underprivileged (Singh 23).

In the 1930s, Anand started writing as life in India was changing drastically. Writers of the era were criticizing poverty, illiteracy, casteism, superstition, and untouchability at the same time that one side of the political freedom struggle was making progress. They felt that political freedom was meaningless and incomplete without economic as well as social independence. He really does write stories about the outsider, the disadvantaged, and the poor. Not that he was the first to write about the suffering experienced by the oppressed and disadvantaged in his works. Sarat Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, & Munshi Premchand had all done the same in their writings. He chronicled the mistreatment of the demoralized class in his writings. He certainly is the

revolutionary & representative voice of the people belonging to the lower strata of society i.e. poor, the destitute, and the have-nots. The trauma of the untouchables has been artistically delineated in Tagore's *Chandalika*. However, Anand's best-known book, *Untouchable*, is incredibly vivid and manages to make readers aware of their pitiful situation. He has realistically and powerfully conveyed this class of society's aspirations, hopes, sorrows, and sufferings.

*Untouchable* is an emotional portrayal of the miseries suffered by the lower classes during British colonialism, as well as their struggles against repressive norms and antiquated Hindu/Brahmin practices. For the last two hundred years, slavery has caused hardship to the Indian society. Ancient customs of caste and class discrimination persisted in breaking the human spirit of freedom and dividing people from one another. Despite suffering on various levels, society was unable to come together under a single, impartial human flag. They continued to disintegrate under several banners. For someone with a soft heart like his, this unfairness was eroding the basis and threatening the strength of the nation. Anand was able to observe and understand how the country was being undermined by the extensive prejudice in society. Therefore, the book *Untouchable* is a heartbreaking and pitiful scream by the author against the bigotry and violence of the upper caste against the Dalits, the subalterns, & the lower castes. It is his brutal indictment of India's once inflexible, progressively collapsing caste system.

In this story, social protest is used to identify India's biggest problems. The Gandhian Harijan and modern Dalit community are the emphasis. There are 4 major caste divisions in the traditional Hindu Varna System – (i) Kshatriyas, (ii) Brahmins, (iii) Shudras, and (iv) Vaishyas. Although, this caste division was originally on the basis of the division of work profession or labour in society. But with the passage of time, a drawback entered into this system, and the caste of a person was taken into account from the family genealogy in which the person takes birth. This caused numerous problems because the four three of the four varnas Vaishayas, Brahmins, and Kshatriyas considered the fourth one,

the Shudras a low caste and their work poor. They existed at the lowest level of the hierarchal system and they had to observe a different code of conduct, and different ways of talking, walking and appearing in public. J. H. Hutton remarks:

“In The Indian Caste system, Hinduism was the backbone of the purity-pollution complex, and it was the religion that influenced the daily lives and beliefs of the Indian people...” (Hutton 48)

Hutton means that in the Indian caste system, Hinduism (more specifically the Brahmins) has the final say on pure or impure because it sets people's beliefs and allots every man a task from birth. As per the Manu Smriti, the official source of Hindu social & domestic law and conduct, knowledge of Vedic literature and other scriptures is forbidden for Shudras, also known as the fourth Varna or untouchables. They don't even have the freedom to hear the Mantras or the Vedic chanting, let alone visit the temples. Since Sanskrit was the language used for the majority of holy texts, they were also deprived of the opportunity to learn it. This led to the great language's decline and eventual disappearance, and it is now all but extinct.

It is crucial to note that because of the filthy tasks they must perform, sweepers and scavengers are viewed as *achhuts* or the untouchables. The members of the so-called superior caste thought that being touched by a scavenger or sweeper might pollute or infect them. In our nation, religion is very crucial, with Hindus evolving as the main prevailing religion. For the Brahmins, the existence of an untouchable was a bad sign. Despite the fact that these so-called untouchables worked in the fields to give the Brahmins food along with other supplies of life, these guardians from higher castes, who were morally superior, tried to misuse and subjugate these downtrodden members of the dominant social structure. This was the most ironic aspect of the event. In *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand has successfully highlighted this grave issue prevalent in the Indian society with caste system.

In *Untouchable*, Anand “chose his hero from the lower class of society and presented real India because he firmly believed that the people of

real India don't live in bungalows and palaces, but in villages and poor huts. The realistic picture of India can be seen among untouchables, carpenters, poor farmers, destitute women, and impoverished children. He made these victims of society more powerful with every novel written later on, and via every character, he tried to represent the miseries of their class, gender, and caste in which they grieved. In the context of *Untouchable*, Walter Allen comments: “It is only through the character of Bakha that the novelist can succeed in arousing sympathetic comprehension instead of aesthetic function in our readers” (Allen 17)

The work highlights the hardships, suffering, and humiliation endured by the underclass in Indian society, reflecting the inhumane and heartless mentality of the brutal caste system of Hindus. In a country that says that all individuals are like families, but in reality, one segment of the family is not permitted to be treated equally with the others, there is extreme inequality and social anarchy. The faithful picturization of the facts, vivid and graphic details, and accuracy lead to the orthodox and rotting social order. Anand became overwhelmed by the sadness that this exceptionally talented youngster was often the target of insults from most people due to his miserable social status. Because he could infect his classmates with his touch, he was unable to be admitted to a school. The narrative emphasizes the injustices and societal wrongs committed against this downtrodden and destitute class of people.

Sohini, Bakha's sister, is a picture of a patient and obedient woman who daily went to the village well with a pitcher to fetch water. She was not permitted to touch the water, so she used to wait for a Hindu of a higher caste to come so as to assist her with drawing water from the well. The inadequate condition of the untouchables is deeply distressing since they are forced to depend on the goodwill of upper-caste Hindus in order to get water from the public well. Because of their inferior status, the low-caste people were compelled to dwell in filth, dust, and thirst because they were too impoverished to have their own wells. According to Anand:

"The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream." (14-15)

An essential piece of evidence for comprehending the socioeconomic issues facing the Dalit or the subaltern population in this book is the good episode. Anand criticizes the evils of the wealthy class's belief that they are the only ones capable of enjoying life's necessities and the Hindu caste system. It is reported that Sohini is submissive, patient, meek, and obedient to the urges and desires "of the lustful upper caste people like Pandit Kali Nath. As filling the pitcher from the local well, Pandit Kali Nath kept his eye on the girl. After that, he tried to molest her by inviting her to clean his" home. Pandit yelled, 'Polluted, Polluted!' when she refused. At a residence, two people are pleading for food. One is a Sadhu, or holy man, to whom all homage is paid since they will gain from his blessings. Anand exposes the hypocrisy, pretense, and farce of Hindu culture, the lady of the house reacts furiously as an untouchable Bakha begs for food but is treated with brutality and contempt.

"You eater of your masters...You have defiled my house! Go! Get up, why didn't you shout if you wanted food? You have defiled my religion! Now I will have to sprinkle holy water all over the house." (63)

### Conclusion

Conclusively, there is no doubt that in the novel *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand has shown a true as well as a realistic picture of typical Indian caste system or the so called Brahminical Indian society where the condition of the low caste people was quite miserable and wretched. So, through Bakha's character, Mulk Raj Anand wants to spread awareness of the conscience of the out-castes and exploited people. The novel tells the story of the oppressed in Indian culture, created by society to suffer, and conjures up images of the terrible social ills that pervaded the country throughout the

colonial era and the decades that followed. The novelist has succeeded in portraying a clear and vivid image of Indian society, capturing the essence of pre-independence India with an uncommon level of realism. Thus I can say that *Untouchable*, by Mulk Raj Anand is a true representative of Indian Society.

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