



Conflict between Caste and Class in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand was a well-known Indian writer in English. His notable work depicts the lives of the poorer lower caste and is translated into many Indian and foreign languages. His progressive writing gives inspiration to the writer to focus on the subaltern society. The characters represented by Mulk Raj Anand in his novel is always searching for their identity in adverse conditions. He deals with the burning issues of how the upper-class people were discriminated against the caste and taken light on the injustice of the lower caste. He points out the condition of the Dalits in the very adverse situation of caste discrimination, cruelties, detestation and atrocities also his novels show the battle against the enemies of humanity, equality and injustice. The present paper discusses about caste discrimination, inhumanity and victimization by the upper class on subaltern people. Key words: caste, class, subaltern, discrimination, injustice, victimization

Mulk Raj Anand was a famous Indian English writer. He chose to write realistic and naturalistic novels and portrait the life of the lower caste and poorer people in traditional Indian society. He was an internationally fame widely-read writer in India. His work depicts casteism, capitalism, imperialism, inhumanity, discrimination, injustice, inequality etc as barriers in society. Mulk Raj Anand's important work *Untouchable* throws lights on the miserable life of the down-trodden section of poop-cleaners and sweepers. This novel condemned the social, economic, and cultural impact of India's own rigid caste system. Anand painted a portrait of the struggle to assert one's humanity and dignity.

Untouchable (1935) is a slim but powerful and most popular novel by Mulk Raj Anand, illustrate the life of underdog and downtrodden people. The novel deals old ideology of untouchability. The protagonist of this novel is Bakha, a sweeper boy. He is a victim of social discrimination caused by the deeply rooted Hindu hierarchy. Bakha is eighteen years old poor, sensitive and innocent boy who lived

in the town of Bulanshahar. His father named Lakha is Jamadar of sweepers of the town and cantonment. Bakha lives with his father Lakha, his younger brother Rakha and his sister Sohini in the dirty colony of sweepers were situated in public latrines and the ramparts of humans and animals refuse to lay on the outskirts of this little colony. The colony is surrounded full of dirt, ugliness, squalor and misery. The relation between father and son is unnatural because of Bakha's laziness and his attraction towards the English lifestyle. Lakha was a typical old Indian father abusing his children and place all his responsibilities on his eldest son. Hence, from the age of eighteen, Bakha had burdened to work as a sweeper from early in the morning till late in the evening.

Bakha starts cleaning latrines at daybreak. Once he touches a caste Hindu accidentally, he was slapped by Lalla which, makes him shout his approach, "Posh, posh, sweeper coming." In another

incident, Sohini goes to fetch water for the village well. She is waiting in a queue behind the other outcasts. In a queue there is one of Bakha's friends' mother Gulabo waiting for water. She is always jealous of Sohini. Kalinath, the priest from the town temple helps Sohini to get water. He invites her to his house and tries to molest her. Sohini starts screaming, he shouts, "Polluted! Polluted!" These two incidences in the novel show the absorption of lower caste people by higher class people.

One day Bakha attend the marriage of his friend Ram Charan's sister. He likes her but couldn't marry her because she belongs to a higher caste. When Ram Charan saw his friends, run off with them despite his mother's protestations. Bakha told them about the slap and Sohini's assault, his friends feel embarrassed and indignant. They thought about revenge but Bakha realizes that revenge would be dangerous and futile in the end. Another one Bakha goes to play a hockey game with the hockey stick gifted by Charat Singh. He scores the first goal. The goalie of the opponent team hits him, this starts a brawl between two teams. It ends when the younger brother of a player gets hurt. Bakha picks up him and rushed to his home, the boy's mother blames him for killing her son. Due to this incident, Lakha banishes Bakha from home. This time Bakha runs towards the town, where people gathered to listen to Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi told in his speech about ending untouchability.

Mulk Raj Anand had presented exploitation by the higher class of the society in his novels. In the novel *Untouchable*, Anand presents two types of characters. The exploiter is from rich high caste people, who exploit on poor lowers caste people. He represents the number of characters with their speciality. Lakha, Bakha, Lakha, Sohini, Gulabo are indicative of lower caste, and Pandit Kalinath, Halvinder Charat Singh etc are higher class people. All the characters are showing the weaker and powerful group of the society. The writer's mercy for the exploited and downtrodden. In his novel, the conflict between the weaker and powerful groups has gained importance.

The protagonist in the novel was poor, laborers. Bakha lives in a dirty one-roomed cottage. Even at the age of eighteen, he has worked from morning to evening as a sweeper. He has to undergo all humiliation so often inflicted on sweepers in the caste-ridden Hindu society. Every day he has to go on his work with his broom and basket. The high-class Hindus are his superiors. Lalla slaps him, Pandit Kalinath tries to molest Sohini because they belong to the lower caste. This weaker group in the Hindu caste hierarchy tolerates everything. There is the desire for revolt in Bakha's mind but it doesn't come to the surface level. He wants to protest against the tyranny of the high caste Hindu but he becomes the victim of them.

Bakha, the protagonist of the novel belongs to Dalits. He is always in search of his identity in society. He like the English way of life and English clothes. He wants to become like a Sahib. Bakha does his work efficiently he has to clean dirt and dung even though he remains clean. The poignant scene in the novel *Untouchable* realizes the real position of the Bakha in the social order. Accidentally Lalla brushes up to Bhakha, he did not see him because the sweeper forgot to give him a call. His yelling attracts many people and he slapped Bakha. This moment realizes to him the exact position in society, which instigates him for self-identity. "For them, I am a sweeper, Sweeper – Untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!" Though his job was dirty, he comparatively cleans and works competently. The oppression, exploitation, discrimination, inhumanity and injustice are subjected to know their place in the society. His wandering from place to place is indicative of his search for identity.

The protagonist of the novel continuously struggles against social discrimination, hypocrisy, cruelty, injustice and inhumanity. When Kalinath tries to molest his sister Sohini. His eyes turn red with anger but unable to do anything. He realizes the truth that human beings discriminate against caste and class. He doesn't have any right or there is nothing any ray of light to stop all this discrimination. He wishes to struggle

against the emancipation of the untouchable. His first attempt for equality in society is to attend his high caste friend's sister's marriage. Society is based on the caste hierarchy. But we are human beings, we need equal rights in society. At the end of the novel, Bakha gets three possible solutions to the problem of untouchability. The first option is a missionary that conversion to Christianity; the second option is Mahatma Gandhi, who fights out for the ending of untouchability; and the third option is a poet named Sarshar mentions the imminent arrival of flushing toilets which eradicates the need for humans to handle refuse. This modern toilet helps to end untouchability. After return at home from Gol Maidan, he is strongly hopeful about the change. The third option fascinates the mind of Bakha.

Mulk Raj Anand's account of presenting a realistic depiction of lower caste untouchables' life exposes the hierarchy and callousness of caste in Hindus. The dung cleaning machine introduced by a young poet is a revolutionary idea. Birth by birth the work of cleanliness will end with the invention of this toilet and it helps for ending of untouchability. The young poet introduces the idea about the dung cleaning machine is an encouragement for untouchables. The main reason for the underdog and indignation at the exploitation in the masses is the name of caste, class and race. The novel ends with the hope of change in Indian society.

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