

The Curse of Caste and Class System Portrayed in *Untouchable*

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Abstract

Untouchable is a socially conscious and sociological novel written by Mulk Raj Anand. Mulk Raj Anand is one of India's most popular short story writers. Untouchables written in 1935, focus attention on a number of social beliefs, customs, traditions and social evils of Hindu society of 1930s. It also deals with more particularly the curse of cast and class systems. Orthodox Hindu society is cast and class ridden. Untouchables live their sub human life in Kuchcha, mud walled, one roomed cottage in unhygienic condition. Untouchables are very poor, under fed, weak and diseased. Lakha in this novel suffers from asthma. Bakha's mother died as the family could not arrange for timely treatment. Bakha himself was seriously ill in his boyhood and his father had to face hard time. None of the Hindus comes forward to the untouchable colony believing that their visit would pollute them. The untouchables cannot draw water from well. Sohini, Bakhas's sister, Gulabo and other untouchables have to wait for hours for water. On the contrary the people of upper Hindu cast do not mind molesting a sweeper girl if they like her. PT. Kali Nath in this novel sexually ill treats Bakha's sister Sohini. When his attempt fails, he shouts "Polluted! Polluted! The curse of untouchability was dominating all over India. Mahatma Gandhi also started his crusade against this social evil when the torturing and killing of untouchables was a common events.

Key Words: Caste, Class System, Untouchable

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand is a popular social novelist of contemporary society. Anand depicted social issues and social discrimination on the basis of caste and class system. Anand's commitment for social revolution through his social ideology is remarkable. The novel Untouchable opens with a

Description of the outcast colony where they were living without any facilities. Their colony is portrayed thus in the novel. The people of out caste were the lowest stratum of Indian society. They suffer extreme economic and physical deprivation. He paints a stark picture of the condition in which these people live. The outcaste colony

was a group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow of town and the cantonment. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer-men, the barbers, water carriers, the grass cutter and the other outcast from Hindu society. Bakha, the hero of the novel and his family live in a dark and dingy one room house.

Anand's Untouchable is a story of the lowest caste Bhangi, the caste was considered untouchable even among the untouchable castes. Earlier Hindu society condemned Untouchables as the dirt of society. Hindu society did not consider Untouchables as human beings at all. This inhuman discrimination is the shameful

drawback of Indian society. The author has realistically depicted the truth. In his two novels *Untouchables* and *Coolie*, Anand deals with the misery and wretches of the poor and untouchables and their struggle for better life. The outcastes are at the mercy of the Hindu not only for food but even for water.

After morning hard work of cleaning the public latrine, Bhaka, the sweeper boy went home. He was thirsty and hungry and asked his sister Sohini for a cup of tea. His sister told him that there was not a drop of water in the pitcher. She took pity on her brother and went to the well to bring water. The people of untouchables and outcaste were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well because people of the three upper caste considered the water polluted. They have no their own well because they could not afford it. They were not allowed to draw water from the well of upper caste. They had to depend on the mercy of the people of uppercaste to pour water into their pitcher. When Sohini reached the well, She saw there was none to give them water. She waited patiently. Gulabo, the washer woman was also there. She was a fair complexioned, middle aged woman who had been very beautiful in her youth. She was jealous of Sohini's blooming beauty. Sohini, being the lowest caste was looked down upon by Gulabo. Gulabo thought herself superior to every other outcaste. Gulabo asked Sohini to go home because there was none to give her water. Sohini bore all humiliation and insult patiently. Pundit Kalinath, the temple priest appeared there and all of them prayed to him to draw water for them.

The priest Pundit Kalinath drew water with great difficulty and all outcaste ran towards the well.

Gulabo said that she was the first to come for water. Pundit Kalinath recognized beautiful Sohini in the crowd. He called her and poured water into her pitcher and asked her to come and clean

the court yard of the temple. When Sohini goes to clean the courtyard of the temple she is molested by pundit Kalinath. Untouchables could not get enough and hygienic food and they did not get medicine due to untouchability.

“The sweeper is worse off than a slave”

Conclusion

Anand wants to awaken the exploited, suppressed, oppressed and dehumanized classes of the society. He, therefore, criticizes social maladies, human hypocrisies, and individual idiosyncrasies. He has pointed out social conflicts and ills, which he has seen and experienced intimately in his own surroundings. Along with criticizing social snobbery and prejudice in his novels, Anand urges for a larger outlook, more tolerance, more intimate, more self-sacrifice and better understanding. *Untouchable* is usually held as Anand's most compact and artistically satisfying novel. *Untouchable* is undoubtedly a sociological novel which seeks to stress evils of caste-system, classism and untouchability by focusing attention on the miserable plight, suffering, poverty and degradation of a large section of Indian society.

References:

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