

Socio Economic Deprivation and Exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel, *Untouchable*

Prof. Ramchandra Laxman Gadekar

Prin. Dr. N. K. Shinde

Chhatrapati Shivaji College, Satara, (M.S.) India

Abstract

In post independent period, most of the Indian writers explored Socio-Economic problems in Indian Society. The problems like partition, communal conflict, caste and gender discrimination are the major issues in their writers. Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable* depicts socio economic deprivation and exploitation reflects the theme of deprived and exploited in the Indian society. The title itself is apt because the novel depicts the predicament of the untouchable castes in India. Bakha, a protagonist of the novel passes through the fiery ordeals because of his only fault of being low-caste born. He is constantly denied to get basic facilities like public spaces, education and wells. The upper castes treat the lower castes less than human beings. Bakha is forced to do degrading jobs like cleaning latrines without compassion and compensation. This is his economic exploitation. He is deprived of because of his degrading job like cleaning the latrines. His father being hopeless and helpless contrary abuses and bullies him because the fear of sepoys His sister Sohini is tried to molest by Pandit Kalinath. This is again sexual exploitation of the untouchables or low castes or marginalized. Thus, Mulk Raj Anand seems to eradicate the caste system and exploitation of the low-castes through his novel, *Untouchable*. Mulk Raj Anand is notable writer in part independent Indian Writing in English. He has written many novels and short stories, he explore social problems in Indian Society. His well-known novel 'Untouchable' depicts the socio-economic deprivation and exploitation of lower caste Indian. Hence it is seems the novel untouchable is realistic in notice and reformative in function.

Key words: Untouchables, deprived, exploited, low-castes, upper castes, latrines

Introduction:

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was an Indian writer in English and a pioneer of Indo-Anglian fiction. He chooses heroes and characters whose freedom of action is limited by the realities of the hierarchical society

Untouchable (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand is set in the fictional Indian town of Bulashah. It depicts a day in the life of Bakha, a young protagonist who works as a sweeper and does the work of cleaning latrines. But Bakha is rejected and

neglected on the account of his low position and low job in the society.

As mentioned by Mulk Raj Anand, Bakha, is a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied the son of Lakha, the Jemadar of all the sweeper in the town But Bakha has to face many sufferings like sleeping without enough warm blanket and getting up early in the morning to clean latrines in the cold seasons though he is bullied and abused by all, a very few people like Havildar Charat Singh look upon him as a human being and respect him.

The theme of deprivation and exploitation in 'Untouchable' is seen on the account of the following factors.

Social exclusion:

As Mulk Raj Anand has mentioned on the very first page of his novel 'Untouchable' that the untouchables were having in the outcastes colony, a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other out castes from Hindu society. They were living near the brook-lane where all the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it. The poor people lived in the odour of the hides and skin of dead carcasses. They would make fuel cakes from the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes. Moreover, Bakha is constantly denied to basic facilities like public spaces, wells and schools simply because of his low-caste.

Dehumanization:

The upper castes treat the lower castes below the dignity. As Bakha is always treated at the hands of the upper castes less than human being because of his low caste.

His ancestors also became sweepers and found themselves at the bottom of society. His father, Lakha, being helpless gives bad names to his own son, Bakha due to the fear of sepoys.

"Get up, oh you bakhya, you son of a pig Get-up and attend to the latrines or the sepoys will be angry" (Anand : 1935 p-5)

Bakha seems to be given bad names and bad treatment not only by his father but also by others. As someone shouted:

"Oh, Bakhya! Oh, Bakhya! Oh, you scoundrel of a sweeper's son! Come and clear a latrine for me!" (Anand: 1935, p-7)

Physical Exploitation:

Bakha, along with his low-castes people is forced to do menial and compulsory labor like cleaning latrines with no respect or any compensation.

Sexual exploitation:

Pandit Kalinath, the priest attempts unsuccessfully to molest Bakha's sister Sohini.

Social exploitation:

Bakha is slapped in a busy street of Bulandshah by a caste Hindu for involuntarily touching him. Bakha and his sister, Sohini are accused of polluting the temple after an unsuccessful attempt by Pandit Kalinath to molest Sohini.

As B. Damodar Rao asserts, "Through his satire Anand highlights the point that there is nothing in Pandit Kalinath which would justify the special position and privileges granted to him by virtue of birth and profession. But exposing the priest who is polluted by the very shadow of the untouchable but makes a cruel sexual assault on Sohini behind the courtyard of the temple, Anand locates hypocrisy at the centre of the Hindu Society." (B. Damodar Rao, 'Afterwords' to Untouchable, p-154)

Economic Exploitation:

The lower caste people supposed to do very low jobs like cleaning latrines, the job of the leather-working and even the job of making fuel cakes out of dung. As per their work, they don't get enough economic benefits in terms of their wages and salaries. Bakha is supposed to perform menial works like cleaning latrines with a low salary. His father, Lakha is the Jemadar

of all the sweepers in the town yet he does not have enough sources of earnings, As a result, his son, Bakha has to do a job of cleaning latrines for the sepyas. In short, the lower castes depend upon. He upper castes economically Bakha whose mother died, has to do degrading jobs like cleaning latrines with little compensation. So he lives in the poverty struggling for the existence and earning a bread.

Psychological impact:

The protagonist, Bakha faces constant humiliation and discrimination. He is insulted everywhere by everyone for being a low caste boy. Bakha's mental state causes feelings of hopelessness and longing for a better life. Bakha faces identity crisis because he is not happy with his place as an untouchable in the society who has been the cause of negligence since his childhood. The problem of Bakha is that he does not accept or surrender to social injustice made by the upper castes.

In short, Bakha is a universal figure created by Mulk Raj Anand who fights against social injustice and racial discrimination created by the upper castes to dominate the lower castes.

As far as Bakha is concerned, he is optimistic and is influenced by the ways of the Britishers to great extent. He tries to wear English clothes and smokes 'Red-Lamp' cigarette. He had secretly told himself:

"I will look like a sahib" (Anand: 1935 p-3)

To sum up, Bakha is a symbol of the hardships and humiliation that the Dalits

and Marginalized encounter with the system of Hindu Hierarchy in India.

As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, "The outcaste is a bye-product of the caste system. There will be out castes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system."

(B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of caste* : The Annotated critical Edition)

Conclusion:

Mulk Raj Anand seems to reveal the hypocrisy of the upper castes and stands behind the low castes person like Bakha through his novel 'Untouchable'. The novel does not accept the traditional Indian assumption that those who clean dirt are dirt Bakha is superior to all the figures in the novel with regard to his work Mulk Raj Anand shows how hollow is the society's equation of the sweepers with the dirt they remove.

Mulk Raj Anand through the story of Bakha, illustrates the suffering and exploitation of people due to caste system and argues that the caste system is inhuman and an unjust system of oppression. According to Anand, the caste system exploits and dehumanizes the untouchables. The novel throws light on reform and the end of untouchability.

The novel ends with the rays hope when Bakha learns about the invention of the flush latrine machine and becomes happy. The novel also finds place for education which can end the miserable lives of untouchables.

References:

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*. Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, 1977.

Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste* : Bheempatrika Publications, Jalandhar 1974.