

# Economic Challenges and Poverty in Mulk Raj Anand Untouchable

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**Abstract:** This paper explains about economical challenges and poverty in Mulk Raj Anand *Untouchable*. This novel discovers the protagonist character of Bakha and due to his poor condition and in order to feel his family and he compel to leave his native place with the dreams of new world and future. But he faced scores of humiliations, exploitations and economical challenges as a reward in his honest and hard labour. This paper presents an effort to highlight the sufferings and pathetic condition of an underclass protagonist Bakha who firstly exploit in his native place through landlords and secondly, their situation makes poverty. Anand writes about real people and their poor situation that he knows quite closely. Anand portrays with absolute concept of their real life of poor people and compassion the pathetic lives of the poor coolies and also their economic struggle for life and struggle for identity and he expresses his compassion for the victims of injustice and persecution.

**Keywords:** *Untouchable, Death, Economical, Social, Caste, Poor and Dalit.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand novels fall into two categories namely social and autobiographical novels. He focused his attention on the sufferings of economical level, caste discrimination, social status and wretchedness of the poor as a result of the exploitation of the downtrodden class of the Indian society. His themes are mainly focused poverty and the place of woman in the society; superstitions, hunger and exploitation are his common themes. The novel describes a single day in the life of the protagonist Bakha and he is a scavenger boy. The entire action takes place within a period of less than twenty four hours. Though the scene of the novel belongs to a small interior town of the Punjab and the happenings are pan Indian in character. In his novel most of the action of the novel takes place at an outcaste colony and in the streets of the small town. Bakha starts his day by his father and is forced to clean the latrines with a brush and a basket. His sister Sohini goes to fetch water from the caste well where she is compelled to wait for a caste Hindu to draw water which is again a routine for her life. Pundit Kali Nath fills her pitcher with water and summons her with an ill intention to clean the temple courtyard. Ambedkar says and explains,

“Dr. Ambedkar had described in his “Untouchables”, that they were adherents of Buddha, the founder of revolutionary Thought against Vedism, Brahmanism, religious, social and economic status quo. Dr. Ambedkar also conferred higher social status on the Shudras in his book “Who were the Shudras”. He made the Indian women conscious of the cause of their fall and inspired them to rise in social ladder in Hindu system by their own efforts and self- consciousness in his brochure “The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women”. (P-355)

Bakha shows the request of his father rushes to the town to clean the roads. On his way he meets his friends and they plan a hockey match in the afternoon. While walking through the streets of the town, a caste Hindu gets defiled by his touch to which he tries to apologize. The peoples are around the scene and abuse Bakha and he pleads but no one feels pity for him. The rich man gives a slap on Bakha’s face and leaves the place. For the first time in his life Bakha is made aware of his status as an untouchable. He feels and rushes to the courtyard of the temple announcing his arrival aloud. While roaming outside the temple he curiously looks into the temple.

A Brahmin sees Bakha on the steps and shouts at him for polluting the temple. While climbing down the steps he finds his sister Sohini standing in the courtyard frightened and speechless. She tells Bakha about the priest’s attempt to molest her while she was cleaning his latrine. She further tells him that she screamed out of fear and the priest came out shouting that he had been defiled by an untouchable girl. An enraged Bhaka decides to look for the priest but Sohini stops him. As both of them realize their helplessness due to the limitations of their caste and they decide to give up. Bakha sends Sohini home and goes to an alley nearby to beg for food. He starts shouting for food but nobody responds and he tired of the schedule he sleeps on the wooden platform in front of a caste Hindu’s house.

She shouts at Bakha for polluting her house and she asks him to clean the drain to get a piece of bread. Meanwhile a woman from a neighbouring house gives him a chapatti. He returns home and tells his father Lakha about his insult and Sohini’s molestation by the Pandit. Bakha narrates him an experience of his own life and it brings Bakha back to his senses and he leaves the house to meet his friends and after spending some time with his friends he goes to Havaladar Charat Singh to collect a hockey stick. Bakha gets excited with his kind treatment and goes to the playground to play a hockey match. The son of a high caste Hindu is hurt in the quarrel that takes place after the match. Colonel Hutchinson is a priest from the church and finds him lonely and takes him to the church where he asks Bakha to confess his sin so that he can be converted to the Christian religion.

In the railway station he hears the news of Mahatma Gandhi’s arrival in the town and he rushes to Golbagh to hear Gandhi’s speech. With the sight of Gandhi he forgets all the miseries of the whole day. In his long speech Gandhi expresses his wish to be reborn as an untouchable. He calls them ‘Harijan’ and the cleaners of Hindu religion and he also warns them against their bad habits and asks them to stop accepting the cooked food for their work. Through the conversation between Gandhi groups, Bhaka comes to know that the only solution to

eradicate untouchability is the use of machine or the flush system. Bakha's character is modeled after one of Anand's childhood friends who was humiliated by his own mother for being a sweeper boy but whom Anand adored as a hero. Anand can never forget that sweeper boy and the insult and humiliation that he received by Anand's family. He gave voice to his views against the exploitation of a sweeper-boy through the character of Bakha in his very first novel *Untouchable*. The theme of exploitation is best expressed through the character of Sohini, Bakha's sister. She is not only exemplifies caste exploitation but also problem of caste and economical exploitation. Gulabo is a washer woman and a caste superior to all other outcastes exploits Sohini. She is being of the low caste among the outcastes would naturally be looked down upon by Gulabo. (34) She is not only abuses the sweeper girl but also rushes to hit her. Sohini behaves unlike any other outcaste woman. When other women make servile appeal and show their abject humility to the passerby high caste Hindus to draw the water from the well and she sits patiently away from them. She becomes the victim of sexual exploitation due to her caste and poverty. She is very beautiful but she has not enough clothes to protect her beauty from the hungry eyes of the male.

"We cannot do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient against all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us. Some of them are kind."(P-109)

Bakha's thoughts against the established system become significant when we compare it with the passive submission of Lakha to it. Pundit Kali Nath is the priest of the temple in the town. His moral weakness is exposed when he tries to seduce a sweeper girl. When he fails in his sexual assault he accuses her for defiling him. Through the character of Kali Nath, Anand brings out the underlying hypocrisy of the high caste advocates of the morality and culture. Those who firmly believe that the touch of the outcaste defile them and do not get defiled when they sleep with the untouchable women. Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of the local Salvation Army and a Christian missionary is a symbol of the Christian assault on the Hindu religion. As exploitation is the major theme of *Untouchable* and it deals with different types of exploitations such as social, economic, political, religious and sexual exploitation. Anand wants to analyze the predicament of the untouchables and effects of social discrimination on them through Bakha's reflections. Denial of education to the outcastes is a part of social exploitation. Bakha aspires after education and wishes to go to school when he was a child. "But then his father had told him that the schools were meant for the babus, not for bhangis. He hadn't understood the reason for that then."(P-54). Anand defines the text lines,

Mulk Raj Anand's affinity and association with the children of the sweepers attached to an Indian regiment is conspicuous throughout the characterization of Bakha. The delineation of the character of Bakha an untouchable and abhorred by the high caste during pre- Independence, was the need of the hour and that is the reason why Mulk Raj Anand is called a historical writer (P-17).

Anand shows the depression of the untouchables through the question of the protagonist Bakha to clean the drain to get a slice of bread. She asks her son to relieve himself in the

drain so that the sweeper will clear it away. "He was too disgusted to clean the drain after this especially, as the little boy sat relieving himself before him" (10). They do not allow them to touch them though they touch even the stinking animals like cows and bulls. The outcastes are exploited by almost all on economic level too. The sweetmeat seller manipulates the scales to cheat the outcastes knowing that they will not protest.

The shopkeepers always deceived the sweepers and poor people, charging them much bigger prices, as if to compensate themselves for the pollution they allowed by dealing with the outcastes. (P-63)

Anand exposes the high caste shop keepers even and they accept the money paid by the outcaste by splashing water on it and throw at them the things they buy. The superiority and the inferiority complex are both deeply rooted in the high caste and the low caste respectively. The high caste Brahmin feels that to praise the low caste is below his prestige. When the low caste praises him and he accepts the praise with reservation. Anand expresses his anger, agony and despair of the exploitation of the outcastes in the name of religion and through the miserable plight of untouchables he wants to make the reader aware of the horrors of the poverty and sufferings. He makes sensitive to the heartlessness of a few who promising life of the helpless young low caste. They exploit the poor in the name of religion and Brahmin priests and Mahants who are they are allowed to summon anyone to work for them. They allow the sweepers to clean the courtyard of the temple but do not allow them even to tread the steps of the temple. They keep themselves away from the shadows of the outcastes but do not hesitate to molest their girls. These lines explains,

The character of Bakha, is the representative of all the down-trodden society in pre- Independence India. He is a universal figure to show the oppression, injustice and humiliation done to the whole community of the outcastes in India (P-210).

## CONCLUSION

The poor people lives like a scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other out castes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane once with crystal clear water now soiled by the dirt and fifth of the public latrines situated about it and the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. The absence of the drainage system had through the rains of various seasons and made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it. The novel deals with the conflict between the high caste and the

low caste Hindus. The high caste Hindus refuse to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables and also the problem of economical status and poverty.

## References

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