

A Comparative Study of Human and Societal Values in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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The highest peak of human progress is the beginning of divine bliss. Where animality ends, humanity begins, where humanity ends, divinity begins. The meeting point of the highest attainment of humanity and the blossoming of divinity is the base on which the cardinal human principles are established. Human values have never been honored truly anywhere. What is worse, nobody has looked upon humanity with sympathy. Only those were respected who by serving their self-interests climbed onto the higher rostrums of society. It is difficult to step down from the high position of vain glory to rub shoulders with the downtrodden. The neglect of humanity was particularly acute towards the end of each era of the social cycle. In 1930, our India was in the hands of British and at those times only the novel 'Untouchable' was published.

Mulk Raj Anand started writing against the class and caste systems of our country during the 1930s. He was the Grand Old Man of Indo-Anglican fiction, born on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar, the capital city of North West Frontier Province of India before the country's partition. Mulk Raj Anand became an advocate of the subalterns when the country needed moral help and support to eradicate untouchability and superstition. He rose to the occasion with his debut novel *Untouchable* in 1935. It was hailed as a minor classic and he could establish his name as an immortal crusader against the evil practice of untouchability. Mulk Raj Anand's portrayal of Bakha, the central character in the novel *Untouchable*, created ripples in the minds of the people.

Mulk Raj Anand was the true champion of the underdogs. He was the first person to realize in the literary circle the victimization of the subalterns in the society. Mulk Raj Anand's novels vindicate the injustice and the inequality that are rampant in the society. The greatest contribution of Mulk Raj Anand to the Indian fiction is his realism which has paved way for social change. *Untouchable* gives a vivid picture of the caste system that exists in our country. India is known for its rich culture and heritage but the social evil of untouchability has destroyed the unity among the people.

His aim was to correct the evil ways of the society. He was conscious of the fact that the illiterate masses were being exploited by the upper class in the name of caste and creed. His sympathy was always with the underdogs and contributed his might to raise their standard of living. The wretched condition of the oppressed section of the community has been vividly described in *Untouchable*. Almost all his heroes are powerless to fight against the social order as they are overpowered by the organized evils in the society.

In this novel Anand has portrayed a picture of untouchable who is sweeper boy. This character is the representative of all down trodden society in pre-independence of India. The protagonist of this novel is the figure of suffering because of his caste. With Bakha, the central character, there are other characters who also suffer because of their lower caste. They live in mud-walled cottages huddled colony in which people are scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes. The lower castes people are suffering because they are by birth outcaste. But Mulk Raj Anand had depicted the hypocrisy of the upper caste people that men like Pt. Kali Nath enjoy the touch of the Harijan girls. Mulk Raj Anand exposes all this hypocrisy and double standard or double dealing. In this novel Bakha is a universal figure to show the oppression, injustice, humiliation to the whole community of the outcastes in India. Bakha symbolizes the exploitation and oppression which has been the fate of untouchables like him. His anguish and humiliation are not of his alone, but the suffering of whole outcastes and underdogs. Though the novelist communicates about a particular community in the novel subaltern Hindus, it is also implied to the rest of the world, where caste-based, class-based, racial and economic discrimination prevails. His awareness of social exclusion and exploitation of the lower dregs of the society reflect his wish for excluders and exploitators to mend their inhuman ways and to change their social behaviour. For that he uses fiction as a tool, as it is "not only a representation of social reality, but also a necessary functional part of social control, and also, paradoxically, an important element in social change". *Untouchable* shows the evil of untouchability in Hindu Society. The novel's emphasis is on an individual's attempt to emancipate himself from the age old evil of untouchability. Anand is here, concerned with evils of untouchability and the need for radical empathy. He describes the pathetic conditions of the untouchables through the character Bakha, their immitigable hardships and physical and mental agonies almost with the meticulous skill of historical raconteur.

In modern terms, career making demands skills, willingness and devotion to work and all these traits are also essential for the job of sport. Bakha has these traits in him. In this way, he is no less than a sport hero in the modern context. Despite of that he is unrecognized, unsympathised and unloved. Rather, he is humiliated and hurt several times. Simply because he is poor, lives in a one-room house, has no other property and belongs to the lower caste. His hard work pays nothing to him more than some pieces of bread and clothes. This is his economic and social exploitation. The fact is that sweepers are forced to dwell away from the village at the time of Anand's and even after the independence too. Their social exclusion is a matter of great concern. They are forbidden to take water from the well themselves as their touch pollutes it. This imposed rule by the caste-Hindu make sweepers stand away from the well and the so-called upper caste men pour water into their pots when they have leisure and wish to do so.

The irony is that when she goes to clean the courtyard of Kalinath, the lanky priest, he tries to get erotic pleasures from this untouchable girl even in the temple premises. She revolts against him, it's her moral virtue. At this, he scolds and accuses her

of polluting his holy place. This behaviour of the fake holy man is a part of social exploitation only. The priest is not ashamed of taking advantage of the lower social position of this girl and she is helpless. Her brother Bakha is also helpless to express his open resentment of the wound and insult inflicted to his sister, to his own self and to his caste too.

Anand's hero is not of the race, not of the time and the place, but exemplifies all humanity caught in contingencies of an antiquated social order that impedes his evaluation in to a self consistent social life. Anand in *Untouchable* deals with the outcastes engaged in an intense struggle with oppressive forces. Bakha has to struggle and suffer every minute because he is untouchable and he has no right to live like other upper caste. It is over 60 years of independence but the problem of casteism persists even today. Till now we are not able to wipe clean the slate of social inequality.

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