

Social Realism in Mulkraj Anand's *Untouchable*

J. JAYALAKSHMI

Ph.D., Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Arignar Anna College (Arts & Science), Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu

Dr. K. ANAND

Assistant Professor & Head Research Supervisor, Department of English
Arignar Anna College (Arts & Science), Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

Social awareness was always the dominant theme of Mulkraj Anand's novels. Poverty, unemployment issues, selfishness, unkindness are the themes which are highlighted in the novel. He is intensifying political change which essentially demand new class arrangements in the society. In *Untouchable* the rendering of the miserable social condition that existed in the contemporary society is very sensitive. There was no better theme for him the untouchability, the utmost social evil in India. The theme of untouchability is very realistic and appropriate for naturalistic literary work. The novel *Untouchable* is apt to express societies the existing truth happen till now in India. The awareness about untouchability is created only by literature. The elite person should come to comprehend their own mistake done towards subjugated people and should accept them as equal in all aspects. Then only humanism spreads towards the society.

Keywords: *untouchable, social realism, east-west conflict, tradition-modernity*

Mulk Raj Anand is a renowned Indian novelist, distinguished writer, reformer, art critic, editor, journalist, a short story writer and political activist. He opened another area as writers of fiction along with Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan and produced a great deal of English literature. His mastery in the representative and sympathetic representation of the exploited class of Indian society marks his virtuosity as a socially committed novelist. *Untouchable* is a novel by Mulkraj Anand written in nineteen-thirties during which is the Indian struggle for independence was at peak. Since he is aware of caste system, he could depict human sufferings caused due to political and social system of the country.

The word "Untouchable" refers to an Indian caste system that includes the lowermost of the lower working class of India, and is vindicated by different ideas especially religious one. The purpose is to show that even a person belonging to the lowest social class is a human being who has a dignity and suffers from the isolation forced upon him by caste society.

The story depicts a day in the life of a Bakha, a sweeper boy, and discloses the effect on him on the events of that day. Bakha belongs to the lowermost section of the low social caste. Through this novel, it is vibrant that the social structure is divided into many classes and the political regime is corrupted and undergoes colonial power.

In *Untouchable* he brought fictitious life to his boyhood companion, the untouchable sweeper boy – Bakha his hero through his miniature observation as if he has spent a day with Bakha to make it very much real and factual and builds round him a spiritual crisis broad enough to embrace the whole of India in a single day's action and captures Bakha's conceit in his work of cleaning latrines. Bakha serves as a mirror to the deplorable condition of the untouchables and represents all those sweepers who are predestined to live lifetime worse than the slaves. Every aspect of the novel reflects a very true picture of social pragmatism.

The novel begins with a harsh realistic picture of the outcaste's colony and makes the theme of the novel – untouchability itself very convincing. The portrayal of the outcaste colony in the beginning of the novel reveals not only poverty but also the inhuman level of their existence. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its bank. The castes which look after the hygiene of the high classes are intended to live in dirt.

The existences of untouchability have been justified within the context of Hindu religious thought as the ultimate and logical extension of karma and rebirth. Indus believes that persons are born outcasts because of the accumulation of sins in previous lives. Hindu texts describe

these people as obscene and despicable, and any physical contact with them was regard as polluting. Hinduism prevents the Hindus from touching the sweepers or even touching anything a sweeper has touched. For example, the confectioner in *Untouchable* throws the "Jalebis" to Bakha and his assistant splashes water on the nickel coins Bakha has placed on the shoe-board. In addition, if a Hindu mistakenly touches an untouchable "the shortest cut to purification after unholy touch, was to cancel it by touching a Mussulmen passing by". Racial and religious profiling is highly practiced. For instance, priests are above the law and a sweeper must notify his presence by saying "posh keep a way, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!"

Untouchable is the horrifying evil of untouchability. It is an insalubrious result of the caste system which was originally built in Hindu society on the basis of the division of profession. Ram Charan a washer's son and chota a leather worker's son are the playfellows of Bakha. Ram Charan was admitted to be of the higher caste among them. Bakha was of lowermost category as he is a sweeper. Sweepers are the bottommost of the social castes, they are worse than a slave. Bakha wished to be cultured but that was meant only for the Sahib's. They were not ready to educate the under – dogs for fear of contamination. Though Bakha had acknowledged this traditional work, he couldn't admit the statement they are equal to the dung they clean. When PanditKalinath in the temple tried to molest his sister Sohini, Bakha couldn't castigate him because of his intrinsic feeling of inferiority. When he didn't get bread from the people whom he begged, he told his father, "They think we are mere dirt because we clear their dirt".

Untouchability destroys human self-respect. The women didn't have any equalities like men. She was suppressed and subjugated by the male-chauvinistic society. There was so many conditions apply to the women class in the society. The low-class women were treated so badly. They were not considered as a human being. The pollution episode, the incident at the well, the molestation of Sohini, the throwing of bread by the Hindu woman on the road reveal the tragedy of untouchables. The tragedy of untouchables becomes heart-breaking because of their poor monetary condition. Eternal servility is the price of untouchability.

The theme of East - west conflict or of tradition versus modernity has been worked out through Bakha, the hero of

the novel. He is caught between that two worlds, one trying to materialise, the other trying to dissolve. He cannot break free from tradition, and yet the pull of modernism is strong upon him. He would like to change the existing order of things, if he could, but the age - old harassment and injustice of which he has been the victim of weakened caste system. When he accidentally touches and pollutes a man on the street, a crowd gathers round him. In spite of a burning rebellion inside his heart he has to endure the affronts heaped upon him. He tolerates his ill - treatment in the market; he has to bear his sister's ill- treatment too. He is caught between revolt and fear.

Bakha wants to change his traditional lot. In this respect, he is a contrast or foil to his father and brother who submissively accept them lot, and never dream of changing it. They are true representative of the forces of tradition, orthodoxy and conservatism, while Bakha stands for social change and transition from the old to the new, for a betterment of the lot of the under - dog of society.

Bakha is contemporary in his outlook, ways, dreams and reveries. He does not want to live like an untouchable but like a white Sahib. He dresses in a modern fashion, smokes cigarettes like the Sahibs and wants to learn their tish- mish (English). He wants to give up all that is traditional, conventional, and conservative. But he is an Indian every inch. When Pt. Kalinath makes an attempt to molest his sister, he gets all fiery and angry. Above all it is the modern solution, the introduction of the machine, that seems to be the most effective way to solving the untouchability to him.

Thus, we see that the novel is not only the picture of the 1930's and of the social scene of the age but also deals with the theme of the tradition and modernity. This novel shows the subjects like untouchability, exploitation, poverty and wretchedness, labour problem, hunger, religious and narrow fanaticism, condition of women, economic insecurity etc. This novel tries to link politics and fiction by promoting the human rights. It is said before the people to understand the fact that the redemption of human beings is possible through the realization of the significance of human rights and the practice of it.

Works Cited

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