



## Dalits in Mulraj Anand's "Untouchable"

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**Abstract:** *In the first-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of Gandhi and Subhash, the whole nation fought to get Swaraj by the means of non-violence and violence. We fought and got freedom from the British Empire but we couldn't fight unitedly against the evils at home. Social evils fully flowered during the time in the form of women exploitation, child marriage, infanticide, caste conflict, untouchability, etc. Out of these vices, the monster of caste had clutched the Hindu society and fogged the future of the nation. Many eminent thinkers and workers had anxiously thought about the evils to remove it. But the clutch of caste system was/is immortal in Hindu dominated India. It had decayed the nation since many years. The role of caste system was/is very vital in Hindu society. Dr. Ambedkar writes about the caste system:*

**Key words:** *Hindu society, public sprit, untouchables*

*Caste has killed public sprit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy... there is carity but it begins with caste and ends with caste. There is sympathy but not for other caste (Ambedkar, B.R.37)*

Further he says about the disastrous effect of the caste, 'caste has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindu (Ambedkar, B.R.25)

In the Hindu Varnavyavastha untouchables were at the lowest bottom. They were not considered as Human beings. Their misery was this. They were born in debt and perished in debt; they were born untouchable, they lived as untouchables and they died as untouchables. (Keer Dhananjay : 2). Obviously, we can guess, they were inhumanly treated, sometimes worse than animals. Though Gandhi renamed

untouchables as Harijan so that the Hindu society could accept them. But it remained only a mockery of untouchables. Brutality on ex-untouchable does not stop, so they identify themselves. Brutality on e-untouchable does not stop, so they identify themselves as Dalit, the depressed community. This paper` is an attempt to discuss the miserable conditions of untouchables depicted by the "Sahitya Academi" awarded writers.

Anand's realistic novel of Dalit community was earlier rejected by the nineteen `British publishers but later on published in India. Because only Indian an understand what is untouchable and what is untouchability? Forster has aptly remarked on this novel:

*"Untouchable" could only have been written by an Indian and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no touchable*



*could have written the book, because he would have involved in indignation of self pity (Forster, E.M. 67).*

The theme of the novel 'Untouchable' is an eventful day of Bakha, a young sweeper – Bhangi, the lowest caste among the untouchables. The novelist has depicted Bakha and his community's suffering in a realistic manner. They were forced to live in the socially excluded of filthy locality:

*'A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes...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 made it an "uncongenial" place to live in. (Anand:9)*

In this novel Anand has selected Bakha, a Bhangi boy as a central character of his work, the new trend he has started to give a voice to the centuries oppressed Dalits. His attempt to challenge the tradition is tradition versus modernity, so Bakha is presented as a "child of modern India" (Anand : 11).

A sweeper boy, living in such a dirty colony cannot stop his desire to come out from his misery, to be good, and merge with the mainstream. So whenever he sees Sahibs, he gets something from them and thinks to be a Sahib. "I will look like a Sahib" (Anand : 12)

From early in the morning abuses and hatred showered on him. His father used it "Get up, oh you Bakhya, oh son of pig" (Anand : 13) "Illegally begotten"

(Anand : 15). Sophisticated society would think, a father should not use such language but among Dalit community such vocabulary is used though harsh but natural. It is their unique identification to avoid superficial and artificial language and prefer natural.

Without taking tea or brushing his teeth, like a pet animal in the circus he has to do the untouchable unclean work, to clean others' latrines. And for the drinking water, they have to depend on other's mercy, naturally there was rare scope to take bath. Thus the community was totally dependant on others' sympathy. On that particular day there was no drinking water in his house, so his sister Sohini went to fetch it. But Gulabo, a washwoman, though untouchable, harassed her. Untouchability among untouchables was also a headache issue.

It was the untouchables' misery to wait for someone who will fetch water and pour it into their pots. Even after the independence it was practiced in rural India. The orthodox Hindus believed that edible and drinkable things should not be touched by the untouchables otherwise that would be polluted.

According to the Hindu Varnavyavastha, the Brahmins were at the top. It was strictly believed among them, if they were touched or touched by untouchables, they would be polluted. And polluted person was considered as sinful. But in this novel, the Pandit's attempt to defile Sohini leads us to think he is not a respectable Brahmin but an erotic. When he lustfully tried to clutch her, at that time he was not polluted but when she did not surrender him immediately he shouted, "polluted, polluted". It is not the first attempt of the



upper varnas to rape the downtrodden women. The Hindu religious books gave them licence to have official four wives from each varna. They interpreted it as their convenient, as a result of this, the untouchable women frequently become the victims of their lust.

We witness the most pitiable condition of Bakha in the street of Bulandshahar. He buys jalebis from the sweet shop but the owner throws it at him, as he is a street dog. In one hand he has jalebis then he is lost in his own world, thinking the taste of warm and sweet syrup. But unknowingly the caste Hindu is touched by him, consequently, his jalebis and felicity, both mixed into dust. Later on he has to announce his arrival. In the past untouchables had to do this, so the other people would not be polluted. The boy wants to see "God" in the temple but he knows the consequences. Untouchable's entry into the Savarna temple was banned since time immemorial. He wants, somebody should recognize him as fellow human being, when Charatsingh behaves friendly with him, he has no words to thank him.

Untouchables were born to suffer the brutality of the upper varnas. While playing hockey, bakha has not done any harm to anyone, yet he is badly tread.

He helped the injured boy and brought him to the boy's house, what crime he has done? His help was not appreciated by the boy's mother but insulted thus;

*'Vay, eater of your masters! What have You done? You have killed my son! Give Him to me! Give me my child! You have*

*Defiled my house, besides wounding my son!*

He further says, "Untouchability, I regard as the greatest blot on Hinduism" (Anand : 161). This speech consoles him a lot. He feels there is someone who can understand his misery.

Anand has tried to give a real picture of untouchable's life by presenting an incident of a day. Among the Hindus, caste superiority and inferiority is seriously considered thus:

*These low caste..... unnumbered*

*Generations, living in unrelieved grossness,*

*Have produced human beings in Brahminic India who can scarcely believe that a better State is possible for them. (Cox Oliver:16) To remove untouchability and hatred towards Dalits is not an easy job because it is deeply rooted cultural trait of Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar has strongly opposed the social evil of inequality. He addressed untouchable thus;*

Because of untouchability your merits go unrewarded, there is no appreciation of your mental

And physical qualities; untouchability is a curse that has ruined your existence (Keer:275)

Here in this novel, untouchables are human beings but treated like sub-human beings, "to be ignored, or bullied or exploited as occasion demands" (Naik M.K.29)

The Britishers had legally attempted to remove the caste disparity



by introducing the Caste Disability Removal Act – 1958. The shackles of the caste, even after 69 years of the independence have not been broken. On paper, we could remove untouchable and untouchability. But the centuries old disgust is still practiced in the society, then in pre-independent India, Bakha like untouchables' conditions would be naturally severe; the Act had not protected the untouchable community.

At the summing up, it is observed; the writer has, depicted the untouchable castes at the center of his literary work, though the community was excluded since the ages. He has portrayed the social, cultural and psychological reality of the community in the different stages. The exploitation of Dalits begins with harassment, torturing, molestation and ultimately ends with killing of Dalits. It is true in every part of the country. Anand's attempt to give to voice to the depressed is really salute worthy because this work was published in 1935. When we talk about the Dalits and atrocities on them it means not that we try to widen the gulf between Savarna and Avarna.

It should be considered on the base of Human Rights, Human Values and Human Dignity. When Dalits will be socially and culturally accepted as fellow citizen of this Democratic India, our India will be great in the real sense. But it is tough, not impossible, because; the touchables and untouchables cannot be held together by law...the only thing that can hold them together is love. (Ambedkar :140)

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