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Social life in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel 'Untouchable'

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's novel shows the social issues, sorrows and sufferings that high caste Hindus inflicted on the untouchables. The novel's protagonist is "Bakha", who is an untouchable, low caste boy. The novel is historical that it touches upon the caste system, which gave rise to the practice of "Untouchability" that was much prevalent in the Indian society.

Keywords: untouchability, poverty, sweeper, Cleanliness, Inhumanity, Caste based discrimination.

INTRODUCTION:

Mulk Raj Anand has described Untouchable with the colors of social issues, sorrows and sufferings in the Indian society.

Bakha, the main character:



Bakha is the central character in the novel. he is a young man of eighteen years old, strong and able bodied, the son of Lakha. The novel revolves around his character. Bakha is not simply an individual outcaste rather he represents the community of the outcaste who treated as untouchables and subjected to live most miserably.

The evil of untouchability in India has an ancient history. It roots from the four groups of Hindu castes- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya, and Sudras. The Sudras represents the lowest cast in the caste system. Untouchable is the story of this casteism and humiliation of this sudras society. The opening of the novel strikes the keynote of the theme of the novel: This novel revolves around the Bakha who is a hero and a sweeper boy. The author has chosen a particular day from his life. First situation is the pollution through touch of a

caste Hindu. It creates a lot of problems. when Bakha walks along the road eating 'Jalebi' and recalling the arrangement he has made for learning English, his gaze is drawn to a woman sitting in a window. He is so deeply lost in his thoughts that he has accidentally touched someone passing by. Suddenly he hears,

"Keep to the side of the road, o he low-caste vermin... why don't you call, you swine and announce your approach: Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion: now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself."

Bakha is apparently seized with fear, humility and servility. Bakha realized his social status and moral barrier which he himself is unable to break down.

The second major situation in the novel is when Bakha's sister Sohini is seduced by the priest. Sohini shouted to save herself from being molested by the priest Kali Nath but the priest is very clever and saved himself from the difficult situation by shouting, "*Polluted, Polluted.*" The writer here draws our attention towards the unjust and condemnable behavior of the so-called high caste people who can easily go scot-free by turning the blame on to the suffering, sexually exploited girl. Bakha knows the truth of the whole thing that he finds himself incapable of taking revenge.

At the railway station he heard the news of Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in the town and he rushed to Golbagh to hear Gandhi's speech. With the sight of Gandhi, he forgets all the problems 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 humiliate 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*.

Conclusion:

In brief, Anand has given us one of the immortal characters of literature. The novelist has projected profound psychological insight in the portrayal of Bakha. He is aware and conscious of the social discrimination and injustice. He has the elements of revolt and protest but he has inherited servility of being an underdog of the society. Bakha is also a human being. He has the same blood in his veins as others. If we co-operate with Bakha, he can rise to great heights.

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