

Callousness of the Caste-Hindus towards the untouchables in the novel *Untouchable*

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Received Sept. 20, 2017

Accepted Nov. 10, 2017

ABSTRACT

"Untouchable" is a sociological novel. It shows the injustice and exploitation of untouchables under the caste Hindu society. The novel is concerned with a particular class, through the individual Bakha. However, Anand begins with particular but soon generalize upon his life and suffering. Though the life pointed in the novel pertains to a Punjabi village, it is in a way universal; as far as India and Indian are concerned.

Keywords: callousness of caste.

Introduction:

"Mulk Raj Anand was unquestionably the most distinguished novelist in English with his eleven novels, six volumes of short - stories and several treatise on art, culture and faith".

- Meenakshi Mukharji

As a writer of fiction, Anand's works have vitality and a keen sense of actuality. 'Untouchable' though it is the first novel by Anand, has the harmony of form and content. It is a story of one day in the life of an untouchable.

Suffering and Misery of Untouchables:

The novel begins with a realistic description of the colony where the untouchables live. It is situated at a distance from the city where the upper caste Hindus lives. There live the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters etc. The colony has become dirty by the filth of the public latrines. The dung of the donkeys, sheep, horses cows and buffaloes are heaped up to be made into fuel. According to Rama Jha..."The description of outcaste colony in the beginning of the novel builds up the Sub-human level of the untouchables' existence". Bakha lives with his father, brother and sister in a small-roomed cottage.

The suffering, misery and unhappiness of the untouchables have been realistically depicted by the anguished soul of Bakha. He cannot understand why he has been regarded socially inferior, when he performs his duties extremely well. He had to shout...

"Posh, Posh, sweeper coming, posh keep away...
sweeper coming....".

Bakha had a great desire to go to school, but his father told him that schools were meant for caste Hindus not for sweepers. The masters were unwilling to teach an outcast, "lest their fingers which guide the students across the test should touch the leaves of the outcastes book and they be polluted".

The Life of Sweepers in 1930s:

In 1930s, the sweepers lived the life of suffering, misery and unhappiness. They were considered inferiors and untouchables. They were even denied of getting education. They had to announce of their approach. The outcastes were not allowed to draw water from the well because the caste Hindus think it to be polluted. They could not even take water from the brook because their touch would pollute its water. With their empty pitchers, they had to wait for some generous Hindu to draw water and pour it into their pitchers. The outcastes were doomed to live in the midst of unhygienic and filthy surroundings. They were denied even from fundamental freedom and rights. The loneliness and the dirt had been part of their way of life. They lived a very poor life. Lakha, the jamadar of sweepers always begs for sweet while Bakha has to collect food from the streets. He says to the housewives... "Bread for the sweeper please mother". The behavior of all the Hindus' is depressing. Bakha has to depend upon the charity because he cannot buy a hockey stick.

Exploitation and Humiliation:

Bakha has been exploited and humiliated by the high-caste Hindu. He is a universal figure who symbolizes the exploitation. The pollution-episode, the well-scene, the molestation of Sohini, the throwing of bread by the Hindu woman on the road etc. reveals the exploitation and humiliation

of untouchables. The caste Hindus are callous. They do not allow drawing water from their well. They were polluted by the touch of an untouchable; however, they loved women of low castes'. Kali Nath's attempt to seduce Sohini is the best example. Anand has not idealized the untouchables. He has shown them as they are in all their filth and degradation. Bakha's suffering, misery and wretchedness at the hand of the high caste Hindus have been realistically depicted. While eating sweets, he accidentally touches a Hindu. That Lala gives a sharp slap and begin to abuse him.

Thus, 'untouchable' is a realistic novel. Bakha's anguish and humiliation is not his alone but those of a whole class of people regarded as untouchables. In this way the novel is sociological novel which seeks to stress the evils of untouchability.

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Diligence is the mother of good fortune.

~ Benjamin Disraeli