

CHAPTER - II

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Anand's Untouchable was published in 1935. The source book of this novel is Anand's long confession in two thousand pages written to his beloved, Irene. The confession is an intimate account of his childhood and boyhood days. Untouchable presents a set of adolescent characters- Bakha, Rakha, Sohini, Ramcharan, Leather worker's son Chota, the sons of Babu, Bakha is a central character. The other adolescents occur as the part of the total scheme of the novel. They are minor characters. Rakha and Sohini share some of Bakha's traumatic experiences.

Anand remarked,

I kept on dreaming about several strains in the central character of Bakha, almost as though I was moulding his personality and transmuting it from actuality into the hero of a nightmare. What was the casualty which made this uprush possible? Superficially, it seems that a rare human being, whom I had known from my childhood and adored as hero because he was physically like a God, played all the games superbly, and could recite whole cantos from an epic poem, Heer Ranjnah of Waris Shah, was knocking at the gates of my awareness.... I was aware of his tragedy. That this otherwise near perfect human being was a sweeper, who was always being humiliated by most of our elders on account of his low caste, was not allowed to go to school, even if his father had sent him, flawed his excellence for no fault of his. And though patronised, because he was a good worker and obedient, he was suspected of leading all the young people astray and therefore, was vigilantly watched and kept at bay. The contradiction between the inborn qualities of this youth and the down and out status to which he was condemned, may certainly have been the obvious cause for my broodings about him.¹

This remark shows that Anand's actual adolescent years in his own life have played important role in shaping the young boy-Bakha.

The novel narrates a series of insults imposed on a young sensitive boy in a day. One can't expect great physical changes in Bakha's physical built, in a day. But the mental growth is traceable. Anand describes the physical appearance of his adolescent character. Anand introduces Bakha in these words;

Bakha, a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied.²

Then he goes on saying something or the other about Bakha's physical appearance. After the completion of Bakha's daily round at the latrines, Anand comments :

His black eyes shed fire and his big, broad face was slightly contracted with the fatigue.³

Bakha is lithe and supple. Bakha has five foot two frame with heavy buttocks. Anand narrates his journey in Bazaar in these words :

He was perspiring. His broad, frank face ordinarily so human, so variable, so changing, with its glistening high cheek bones, its broad nose, the nostrils of which dilated like those of an Arab horse, his fine full quivering underlip so alive always, was set and impassive, Silent, grim and deathly.⁴

Anand compliments him;

A superb specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like tiger at bay.⁵

These scattered remarks about Bakha's physical appearance present the hero as an authentic figure. Sohini is Bakha's sister. She has delicate features of her rising beauty. Her innocent and honest face impressed others. She has the young fresh form whose full breasts with their dark beads of nipples stand out under muslin shirt. Anand offers her pen-portrait in these words :

She had a sylph like form, not thin but full-bodied within the limits of her graceful frame, well-rounded on the hips, with an arched narrow waist from which descended the folds of her salwars and above which were her full, round, globar breasts, jerking slightly for lack of bodice, under her transparent muslin shirt.⁶

Leather worker's son Chota was the smartest fellow about the lane, with his neatly oiled hair, khaki shorts and white tennis shoes. Rakha was a short, long-faced, black stumpy little man. His small eyes and the narrow forehead were positively ugly. The elder son of the Babu was simple

and innocent. Another child had big forehead with bright egg shaped face. All these minor characters form the backdrop for a day's happenings in Bakha's life. The centre of interest is the dexterous young boy, Bakha.

Bakha, Rakha and Sohini are motherless children. So healthy domestic life is an impossible thing for them. Their father, Lakha abuses them. He awakes Bakha,

Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten.

The words and phrases like 'cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion', 'Dirty Dog', 'Son of a bitch', 'offspring of a pig', 'the swine', 'the son of a dog', 'rouge', 'illegally begotten', are poured on Bakha. They show the environment around the hero. Bakha has not domestic protection. The economic security is a thing beyond comprehension for this family. The caste and class of Bakha's family is important in Bakha's growing up. Bakha is a victim of the present caste and class system. The title of the novel, Untouchable is without definite article. This shows that Bakha is representative of untouchable adolescents. But that does not mean Bakha has not his own identity. E.M. Forster rightly pointed out,

Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian.⁸

Bakha is a young boy who wants to grow up. But Bakha gradually loses his innocence. The day begins with abuses from his father and loud shouts from the sepoys reminding him of his duty. After finishing his morning round, he went to the town. Bakha bought jalebis. He put a piece in the mouth. It was wonderful to walk while munching the jalebis. But then he forgot to announce his arrival. He touched a caste Hindu. The mob watched him. Bakha tried to explain his position. But the man slapped him. Bakha's turban fell off and the jalebis were scattered in the dust. Bakha's natural reaction to this incident is like this:

" why was all this fuss ? Why was I so humble ? I could have struck him... That man. That he should have hit me. My poor jalebis. I should have eaten them. But why could not I say something ? Couldn't I have joined my hands to him and then gone away ? The slap on my face. The coward, How he ran away, like a dog with the tail between his legs."9

But in the same mood, he recognises his place in the society,

" For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable, untouchable . untouchable., That's the word . Untouchable . I am an untouchable."10

This is a departure point for his innocence. Later a caste woman abuses him while offering the food. He tries to

have a close look at the Gods in the temple. But the people shout that he has polluted the temple. Pandit in the temple tried to molest his sister. He became angry. He spoke to himself :

" I could have given him a bit of my mind."¹¹

But the tradition could not allow him to do so. He took the Babu's wounded son in his arms. But the boy's mother charged him of polluting her son. This type of incident has happened in Anand's actual adolescent years. The religion, family are not safe places for this young boy. He considers the muslims as good persons because they were also outcastes to the Hindus. Bakha is a victim of religion and the contemporary caste and class structure of Indian society. In fact, Bakha has number of good traits in him. He is a dexterous workman, he is a good player. He is admirably clean. He respects the upper classes. But all his good qualifications are of no use. Because he belongs to lowest of the low caste- the sweeper. Bakha identifies his caste :

" They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt."¹²
 Bakha tries to get psychological solace for his tragice plight. His love for modernity is his attempt to protect himself against

the evil caste and class system. He is a devotee of fashion. He smokes Red Lamp Cigarettes. He wants to look and walk like the white sahib. The topis, knives, forks, buttons, old books are the things of attraction for him.

Anand says :

He did not like his home, his street, his town because he had been to work at the Tommies's barracks and obtained glimpses of another world, strange and clean, he had grown out of his native shoes into the ammunition boots that he had secured as gift. And with this and other fashionable items of dress, he had built up a new world, which was his heaven, if for nothing else, because it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnant pools of the lane near which he was born.¹³

Bakha wants to wear the sahib's clothes and speak his language. This love for modern English life is his illusion which allow him to forget the reality for him. Bakha is thankful to good hearted persons like Havildar Charat Singh and the lady who offers him food.

.Bakha is deprived of formal education. But he has the urge for education. Bakha reflects about his school-going :

How nice it must be to be able to read and write. One could read the papers after having been to school. One could talk to the Sahibs. One wouldn't have to run to the scribe every time a letter came. And one would not have to pay him to have one's letters written. He had often felt like reading Waris Shah's Heer Ranza And he had felt a burning desire, while he was in British barracks, to speak the tish-mish, tish-mish which the Tommies spoke.¹⁴

The schools were made for the caste Hindus. He felt the impulse to study on his own. He bought a first primer of English. But his self-education could not proceed beyond the alphabets. He agreed to pay money to Babu's son as the tuition fee for teaching him. Bakha lacks in formal education. But his daily life is his teacher. The experiences in a day taught him everything about why and how his place and position in caste and class ridden Hindu society.

Being an adolescent, his body responds to the sexual impulse. Bakha is the admirer of Ramcharan's young sister. Anand says :

Bakha observed her as she walked along swaying. She was beautiful. He was proud of her with a pride not altogether that of a brother for a sister.¹⁵

At the temple, the pandit tried to molest Sohini. After this incident, the narrator reflects,

He (Bakha) could not think of her being brutalised by anyone, even by a husband married to her according to the rites of religion... But there seemed no difference to his naked mind between his own feeling for her and what might be a husband's love.¹⁶

These are nothing but the thoughts of the Freudian adolescent. Bakha and his companions played marriage. In that game, Ramcharan's sister enacted the role of his wife.



But then she married herself to somebody else at the instance of her mother, Gulabo who had taken two hundred rupees for the hand of her daughter. He felt for her. But again being an untouchable his sexual awareness could not find explicit expression.

The last part of the novel presents three solutions to Bakha's problems. They are :

- A) Conversion to Christianity
- B) To follow Gandhi
- C) Flush system as narrated by the poet.

This last section begins on page number 164 and ends on 213. Most of the aspects of these solutions are beyond the comprehension of this adolescent. These solutions give a vague and distant hope for Bakha. The state of confusion in Bakha's mind is expressed in the end of the novel. Bakha was thinking of everything he had heard, though he could not understand it all. Bakha comes to a tentative decision :

" I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us, he whispered to himself; and what that clever poet said. Perhaps I can find the poet on the way and ask him about his machine."17

In this last section of the novel, Bakha acts as a kind of mouthpiece of the writer.

Bakha is not a rebel. He is angry against class and caste structure of the society. He hates the tradition. But basically his quest is a quest for identity, in a world which refuses to recognise him as anything more than dirt. But he is incapable of taking any direct action against the society. His reactions remain on psychological plane. The narrator comments about Bakha's consciousness :

Why was all this ? he asked himself in the soundness speech of cells receiving and transmitting emotions, which was his usual way of communicating with himself.¹⁸

Thus his revolt remains on consciousness level. But it shows the gradual loss of his innocence. Like Anand's other adolescents, Bakha loves poetry.

Sohini is Bakha's sister. She is also a victim of social forces. She does her domestic duties very well. But her beauty is her crime. Pandit Kali Nath tries to molest her. Sohini's character plays complementary role to Bakha's character. She shares Bakha's experiences. She exemplifies the silent suffering on the part of the young untouchable girls. Her character enhances the effect of Bakha's tragedy. Bakha's brother, Rakha is the true child of out castes colony. Bakha shares his joys and sorrows with his adolescent companions. He plays hocky with them. He tells them about his traumatic experiences in the town.

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Anand published his second novel, Coolie in 1936. The novel narrates the life story of a young hill-boy, Munoo. He is forced to leave his village, Bilaspur. Arriving in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram at Sham Nagar, he faces the tyranny of house wife. Then he finds himself in a primitive pickle factory in the feudal town of Daulatpur. His master, Prabha bankrupts himself and Munoo is on the street again. He becomes a coolie. With the help of an elephant driver, Munoo reaches Bombay. In Bombay, he becomes a worker in a cotton mill. Hari and Ratan help him. He is knocked down by the car of an Anglo-Indian woman who takes him to Simla as her servant. Here, he dies of tuberculosis. This is the brief story of the novel. But so many things happen to Munoo.

The novel presents a set of adolescent companions- Munoo, his village companions Jay Singh, Bishan, Bishamber, the group of domestic servants like Varma, Lehnu in Shamnagar, his co-workers Bonga and Maharaj in a pickle factory, Babu's daughter, Sheila. But basically Coolie is a character novel. Munoo is the major character. The galaxy of other characters only provides situational contexts to Munoo. He is a fourteen year old orphan, staying with his aunt and uncle. Anand introduces him :

Munoo was a genius at climbing trees. He would hop on to the trunk like a monkey, climb the bigger branches on all fours, swing himself to the thinner off shoots as if he were dancing on a trapeze, and then, diving dangerously into space, he would jump from one tree to another.¹⁹

Munoo has olive face and dark brown eyes. Being an orphan, he has not economic security. He is burden to his uncle Dayaram. Like Bakha, he also receives a flow of abusive words like, 'you of the evil start, 'ominous orphan', 'bringer of disgrace', 'illegally begotten', 'idiot', 'pig', 'eater of your master', 'Brute', 'Vulgar', 'stupid hill boy', 'liar', 'swine', 'seducer of your daughter' throughout the novel. By caste, he belongs to the second highest caste-Kshatriya in Hindu Society. But he is homeless wanderer. Munoo tries to find out his place and status in society.

His adolescent curiosity juxtaposes his innocence with the experience. The boy enjoys his company in the hill. But his aunt beats him and his mind is haunted by the slow painful death of his parents. Munoo wants to live. He wants to assert his life. He is curious and eager to know. In Sham Nagar, Munoo is a servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram. This house and the town is wonderland for this rustic lad. The machines like railway, phonograph, telephone are the wonders of modern life for him. He interprets these things

according to his consciousness. Bicycle is a steel horse and gramophone is singing machine for him. Even the act of shaving is a novelty to him. He is not aware of the city manners and customs. He relives himself near the kitchen door step. This results in angry outburst on the part of his mistress. He adds to Nathoo Ram's misery when Mr. W.P. England visits his house. Then in a pickle factory and in Bombay, he tries to understand life. Saros Cowasjee remarks ;

Munoo is the more attractive of the two (Bakha and Munoo) with his irrepressible curiosity and zest for life.²⁰

Each experience in the town kills his innocence. His uncle beats him. He quarrels with another domestic servant. Mrs. Nathoo Ram gives him less food and more abuses to eat. Life in Babu's house is the routine of domestic slavery. Anand says,

The wild bird of his heart, fluttered every now and then with the desire for happiness.²¹

His monkey dance gives him short lived pleasure. He accepts his position as a slave. He wants to be a perfect model of a servant. He hates everyone except Chota Babu and perhaps Sheila. Munoo confirms his identity in these words :

I am kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The babus are like the sahib dogs, and all servants look alike: There must only be two kinds of people in the world; the rich and the poor.²²

With this much knowledge about his position in society he left Sham Nagar. Hope kindless his life. He expects wonderful life in Daulatpur. Prabha and his wife Parvati offer him parental love. But Daulatpur is more confusing to him. The life in pickle factory is dark and evil. Prabha's partner cheated him. Bankrupt and ill Prabha left the city. Munoo becomes a coolie. He accepts his lot :

" All we coolies look alike."²³

The hope of better life forces him to Bombay. But this city is more cruel to him. He gets good friends like Ganpat and Ratan. But the communal riot and the dissatisfaction at the mill force him to run on the streets. He meets car accident. The life at Simla is worst. Being a page and rikshaw driver, he has to work hard. This hard work kills him. Thus every hopeful attempt on the part of Munoo leads him to frustration.

Bakha is the victim of traditional caste system. But Munoo is the victim of class system. His place is questioned in the new class system based on cash nexus. His poverty is responsible for his tragic misfortune. He categorises the

the world into two classes- the rich and the poor. He casts his lot with the poor. His poverty forces him to leave his village. This victimised rustic lad has to move across the country in search of his daily food. His urge for life is admirable. He tries to seek his place and position in society but the society denies him this place. His lust for life ends in his tragic death.

Munoo is creation from Anand's life-experience.

Cowasjee remarks,

He took for his hero his childhood playmate, Munoo, who was consigned to labour in a pickle factory and who accepted his lot with a fatalism peculiar to the Indian peasantry.²⁴

Like Bakha Munoo is a passive character. The society acts upon him. He recognises his status in society. But he accepts it without any complaints. He never questions it. Always as an orphan, he needs affection and protection. He offers himself to the society. The society gives him economic insecurity.

The action of the novel runs for many months. So the physical growth in the adolescent hero is inevitable. We see, Munoo looking in a glass and dressing his hair with the comb. His long thick, black hair refuse the discipline of civilization. Anand comments,

He wished he could grow up soon and have a beard. He wanted to be a man, to flourish in the true dignity of manhood, like the Chota Babu at Sham Nagar. He was little sad to realise that there had not been any appreciable change in his height and girth since he left the village.²⁵

Finally, his physical appearance faces a severe test.

Anand says,

" But really he was mentally and physically broken. And as he thought of the conditions under which he had lived, of the intensity of the struggle, and the futility of the waves of revolt falling upon the hard rock of privilege and possession, as he thought of Ratan and Hari and Laxman, and the riots, he felt sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man."²⁶

His lithe, supple body with a small delicate face and with a pair of sensitive eyes comes to the tragic end due to social forces. But on mental level, he like Bakha is a passive character. It seems that mere survival is the assertion of personality for these caste and class untouchables.

Munoo grows in his sexual awareness. Munoo's upper caste gives him free access in all the classes of society. His adolescent lust is aroused by his master's daughter, Sheila. He bites Sheila on her cheeks. Prabha's wife mothers him. But after the set-back to her family, he could not go and touch this mother like woman. Because Anand adds,

But something had happened to him now, something had changed within him. He had outgrown the natural unconsciousness of his childhood and begun to recognise his emotions. He could not go near the woman.²⁷

Munoo visits brothel in Bombay. Ratan shows him the glimpses of this world. After his return from the street of pleasure the writer informs us about his state,

Munoo felt that he would die with the misery of not knowing what he wanted. That he wanted something, he knew, But what, he did not know.²⁸

At home, Hari's wife Laxmi takes him in her arms. Laxmi, the young wife of an old husband shares her bed with him. In the end, he falls in love with Mrs. Mainwaring. Her love for him borders on two levels- love of beloved and the love of mother. She mothers him in his last moments.

Munoo's curiosity makes him strive for the modern life. He wants to buy black boots, a watch and chain, sola tapee, shorts a tunic and all the paraphernalia of sahib hood. These are his secret wishes. He is eager to see the wonders of civilisation in Bombay. Munoo talks to himself,

I want to live, I want to know, I want to work, to work this machine, I shall grow up and be a man, a strong man like this wrestler.²⁹

This statement shows his wish to live the life and his wish to understand the modern machine. The glamour of English

clothes attracts him to this modernity. He wants to behave like educated person.

Munoo lacks in formal education. He left school from the fourth class. The science books introduced machines for him. Munoo reads different boards in the town. Prabha considers himself capable of keeping the accounts. He utters some English words in the company of Britishers. But this little schooling is not enough to fight the struggle for existence. The class system crushes everything in him. The speeches of the union leaders in Bombay are beyond the comprehension of this young boy. Perhaps, Anand wants to project his answers without bothering about his hero's mental growth. The root causes of the riots and the strife in the unions is beyond the comprehension of this little boy. Mohan tries to solve the worker's problems in Simla. Munoo is passive witness to this solution attempt on the part of the water.

Other adolescents in the novel are a kind of backdrop to Munoo's tragedy. Bakha and Munoo are adolescent lads from the northern India. Both of them are types of individuals at the same time. They love others. They express their gratitude for the kindness. They want to imitate the white

sahibs. But this imitation is for different reasons. For Bakha, it is an illusion. And for Munoo, this is the novelty. Both of them are the victims of socio-political forces. Bakha is a victim of traditional caste system. Munoo is the victim of newly established class-system. They are passive. Their reactions are only on emotional level. The gradual loss of innocence made them aware of their identity. They understand their tragic plight. They come to recognise their place in society. But they are not capable of taking any direct action against the cruel forces in society. They are conscious of their misery and suffering and try to find out the meaning of life. Anand has not idealised his adolescent characters. They ~~are~~ have their own merits and demerits. Being an orphan, Munoo thinks that he is bound to be ill-fated. Some young Hindu boys give a false witness against Bakha when he touches the caste-Hindu.

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