

CHAPTER – II

Untouchable

- [A] *Untouchable* : An Introduction**
- [B] *Untouchable* : A Social Realistic Novel.**
- [C] Poverty of Untouchables**
- [D] Humiliation of Untouchables**
- [E] Exploitation of Untouchables**
- [F] Deprivation of Human Rights of Untouchables**
- [G] Mulk Raj Anand's Compassion for
Untouchables**

Chapter-II

UNTOUCHABLE

This chapter assesses *Untouchable*, the novel written by Mulk Raj Anand on the theme of untouchability in the Hindu society in India. It depicts the evils of untouchability in Indian Hindu society especially in The Pre-Independence period when Gandhiji was trying to gain **Swarajya** and **Surajya** for the Indians. It also throws light on the actual living conditions, poverty, harassment, humiliation and exploitation of the untouchables in those days. It also brings out the author's sincere compassion for the untouchables and his earnest desire for the removal of untouchability considering it as a social evil, "the greatest blot on Hinduism."¹

Untouchable was published in 1935 i.e. before the Indian Independence. In those days, the problem of untouchability was very severe. In *Untouchable*, this caste discrimination is depicted through the actual living conditions of the low caste people in their colony with their poverty, illiteracy, humiliation and inhuman treatment by the sawarnas. Mulk Raj Anand presents their conditions realistically.

Mulk Raj Anand: His life and works.

Mulk Raj Anand was born in 1905 at Peshawar in the North - West Frontier Province of the undivided India before the Independence. Mulk enjoyed his father's [Lalchand's] company who was a coppersmith. Later on, his father joined Indian Army and he went wherever he was sent. Mulk did not show much interest in the craft of his forefathers and he moved with his father to the places wherever his father was transferred. He saw the life in barracks as his father was in Army. He also saw the life in streets where the lowest section of society was treated in inhuman way and was supposed not to touch the other people. With keen eyes, Mulk saw their poverty, their humiliation, their harassment and their social and economic exploitation by the upper caste Hindus.

He also, out of sheer curiosity, peeped into temples not for Gods but for the worshippers of God, the pot-bellied priests. He was curious to know whether the priests were really worshippers of God at all. He also observed the churches. This revealed him the disdainful nature of the Christian Sahibs. He looked around the world keenly. This impact of his earlier impressions was perhaps responsible for his denunciation of priests and the religious hypocrisy in his novels.

In addition to religious hypocrisy in Hindu society, Mulk Raj Anand expressed the need of love and sympathy for the

downtrodden. He also expressed his sincere compassion for the untouchables and the need of eradication of untouchability.

T. Anganeyulu rightly calls a champion of the cause of the downtrodden and says,

"Mulk Raj Anand is perhaps the first Indian novelist in English who writes realistically in his fiction about the doomed lives of the downtrodden and the oppressed." ²

In this regard, Mulk Raj Anand's two novels viz. *Untouchable* [1935] and *The Road* [1961] are important. The first one is the masterpiece. His other novels are: *Coolie* [1936], *Two Leaves And A Bud* [1937], *The Village* [1959], *Across The Black Waters* [1940], *The Sword And The Sickle* [1942] and *The Big Heart* [1995]. Among his other novels are *The Private Life Of An Indian Prince* [1953], *Gauri* [1960] and *The Death Of A Hero* [1963]. He also wrote three volumes of fictional autobiography viz. *Seven Summers* [1951], *Morning Face* [1968] and *Confessions Of A Lover* [1976]. Anand also wrote some short stories, which, are published in a collection entitled as *The Barber's Trade Union And Other Stories*. In 1932, Anand published three celebrated works on art viz. *Hindu View Of Art*, *Persian Painting* and *Golden Breath* that pursue his quest for an understanding of India and her ideals through the study of her arts. Apart from being a writer of novels, short stories and books on Indian Arts, he was a part author of

Homage to Khajuraho, author of *Curries And Other Indian Dishes* and again a part author of *The Bride's Book Of Beauty*.

Mulk Raj Anand is the most celebrated social realist in Indian fiction in English. His novels are mainly on themes about human sufferings caused by political, economic, social and religious factors.³ He is a committed writer who believes that literature is for the sake of man, for refining and ennobling him, for stirring up the feelings of tenderness in him. He attempts to engender compassion in the hearts of men for the oppressed. He has great faith in man. *Untouchable* is a story of his faith in humanity.

Untouchable : An Introduction

Untouchable is a social realistic novel from the pen of socialist novelist. It is a maiden effort of Mulk Raj Anand in the field of novel writing. The novel is not conventional in its theme, technique and other features. First and foremost, it is the first novel written on the theme of untouchability with its protagonist as a sweeper boy named Bakha, a youth of eighteen, partly conventional and partly modern, bending more and more on the side of modernity, whom, his creator calls "a child of modern India".⁴ In the words of the author himself the protagonist belongs to "the lowest of the low"⁵ class of the Hindu Society. The theme of untouchability was not dealt by

any other Indian writer writing in English before Mulk Raj Anand.

Only an Indian and a man of sensibility and compassion for the untouchables such as Mulk Raj Anand could alone write a novel on this theme. E. M. Forster supports,

" *Untouchable* could only have been written 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 untouchable could have written the book because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position. By caste, he is **Kshatriya** and he might have been expected to inherit the pollution complex. But as child he played with the children of the sweepers attached to Indian Regiment, he grew to be fond of them and to understand a tragedy which he did not share. He has just right mixture of insight and detachment and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth ".⁶

The novel *Untouchable* is a product of Anand's humanistic orientation, which is a successful blending of diverse influences from disparate sources such as the Hellenic Idea of man at the core of the scheme of things; the Renaissance Ideal of integrated human development; the Western commitment of science and technology to carve out a better world; the anti-superstition stance of the Indian Lokayata School; Buddha's disavowal of caste barriers and advocacy of Karuna, the brotherhood of man, as preached by Kabir and Nanak; Gandhi's feelings for the Daridrarayan; Nehru's belief in peaceful co-existence; M. N. Roy's enlightened and egalitarian humanism and so on.⁷

The novel has its own characteristics more than one. It is a social realistic novel. It deals with the theme of untouchability that has been prevailing in India over a longer period of time. It is a realistic picture of untouchables and their low position in Indian Hindu Society. It is modeled on James Joyce's *Ulysses*⁸ in its narration, i.e. stream of consciousness technique and psychological analysis of the characters. *Untouchable* narrates the incidents on a particular day in the life of its protagonist and presents a psychological analysis of his reflections on the events.

Hilda Pontes rightly points out,

"*Untouchable* depicts the hero Bakha's one day odyssey through social wrongs and mental cries arising out of encounters with

caste Hindus, traders, housewives and Brahmin priests in the Nawshera cantonment town of North India." ⁹

Untouchable is not divided into chapters, parts or books like a conventional novel. It is a continuous flow of action as one incident is immediately followed by another one very rapidly.

Mulk Raj Anand does not write it in a chronological order by following chronological narration. However, the selected events are in chronological sequence. Often, the action moves backward and forward in the past and the future. For example, Bakha's memories of his dead mother crowd in his mind when Sohini can not provide him a cup of tea or Bakha's memories of his calf love and his reveries of embrace of Chota's sister.

On one hand the novel sympathetically portrays the realistic picture of the miserable life of the untouchables and on the other hand, it ironically expresses contempt for the high caste Hindus. G.S. Balarama Gupta writes in this connection,

"Short, compact and colourful, *Untouchable* is both realistic description of the travails and miseries of untouchables and a fierce diatribe against the high caste Hindus who perpetrate inhuman atrocities against these helpless, downtrodden folk, sunk in poverty and superstition." ¹⁰

The following is the brief outline of the happenings or action in *Untouchable* :

Untouchable is the narration of the events from dawn to dusk on a particular day in the life of the protagonist, Bakha, an eighteen year old sweeper boy.

The action takes place in Bulandshahr, a cantonment town in Punjab in India in the Pre-Independence period. The action covers a day's activities from early morning to evening in the life of the protagonist. It begins from his morning duty and ends in the evening with hopes of future life.

Bakha's day begins with abuses from his father and Havildar Charat Singh. He does not want to go for his work of latrine sweeping. He wants to go to school and become a sahib or babu. But unfortunately, he cannot join the school because he is a sweeper's son. However, he attends latrines and cleans chimneys and feels thirsty. He returns home and expects tea. But there is no water in the house. He feels defeated for a while. But the next moment, he leaves home and comes in the market. He has passion for Red Lamp cigarettes and buys a packet. The betel leaf seller sprinkles some water on the anna, the nickel piece he gives and then throws it in the counter and then throws the packet of Red Lamp cigarettes at Bakha as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistant dog sniffing round the corner of his shop.¹¹

Then, Bakha comes to the confectioner's shop passing the shop of Ganesh Lal, the bania who demanded compound interest from Bakha's father for the borrowed money for Bakha's mother's funeral. Bakha's mouth turns watery and he requests the shopkeeper to give him jilebis four annas worth. The confectioner also throws jilebi at Bakha and his servant sprinkles some water on the money which Bakha puts on the stool to purify it. Bakha unfolds the paper and starts eating jilebis.

Accidentally and unknowingly, Bakha happens to touch a caste Hindu, Lalaji and receives abuses and a curtly slap from Lalaji. This proves to be his first insult on the day. Lalaji, red with anger, abuses Bakha and calls him a low caste vermin, swine, dog, cock eyed son of a low legged scorpion, dirty-dog, son of a bitch, offspring of a pig and what not ?¹² Bakha admits his own mistake and begs his pardon and tries to assure him that he would not repeat the mistake. But Lalaji's anger knows no bounds. He calls Bakha careless irresponsible swine and gives him a slap as a punishment for his being irresponsible.¹³

Bakha gets humiliated and starts shouting his approach in the street. Then he comes near the temple of Shati Deva, where, he stands on the fifth step of the fifteen, leading to the temple. Suddenly, a shout "polluted, polluted, polluted"¹⁴ comes through the air and people abuse Bakha for polluting the temple by coming within sixtynine yards from the temple. But soon, the

reality comes to the surface and Bakha knows from Sohini, his sister that Pandit Kali Nath, the priest in charge of the temple had tried to molest her. Bakha gets angry but cannot raise his hand against a priest as the religion does not allow him to do so.

Frustrated and humiliated, Bakha leaves the place and starts shouting his approach and starts begging for bread in the street. He comes in the silversmith's gully, and gives a call for bread, "Bread for the sweeper mother, bread for the sweeper".¹⁵ But he receives no response from the housekeepers. He feels pains in his feet and lethargy in his bones. He sits on the wooden platform of a house in the lane and almost sleeps. His sleep is disturbed by a call of a Sadhu and followed by dirty humiliating abuses from the landlady. The landlady insults him, humiliates and exploits him but gives no food. The other elderly woman gives only a chapati to Bakha. She also does not give him the chapati with honour but flings it at him from the fourth storey. Bakha picks it up meekly and moves homewards.

He narrates his experiences of the day to his father Lakha. He lodges a complaint with his father, of all the insulting events of the day. Lakha calmly listens to all this, smiles and out of fear for his son for the consequences, asks Bakha not to think ill of the insulting superiors. From his father, Bakha also learns that it is his religion that does not allow him to touch the upper caste Hindus.¹⁶

Bakha's day begins with abuses followed by insult, humiliation, harassment and exploitation by the upper caste Hindus of Bulandshahr. He is so ill-treated by the caste Hindus that he is frustrated. But in the evening, he attends the public meeting held by Mahatma Gandhi. 'Gandhiji's thoughts' on emancipation of untouchables enlighten Bakha. Iqbal Nath Sarshar, a poet discusses about the 'flush system', an automatic latrine cleaning machine without having human being to handle it, as a possible ultimate solution on the problem of untouchability that can make the sweepers free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a class less and casteless society.¹⁷ The child of modern India, Bakha, likes the novel idea of the poet and becomes hopeful for future life. Though his day begins with abuses; though he is frustrated in the afternoon; in the evening, he returns to home with hope because he thinks he will have no miseries of a latrine sweeper in future.

Untouchable : A Social Realistic Novel

Untouchable is a social realistic novel. The term realism is used to any writing that represents life as it is. It is defined as,

"In literature, the term may be loosely applied to any writing that seeks to portray life exactly as it is [or in histories and

historical novels is believed to have been] without embellishment or idealization." ¹⁸

The term social realism means the depiction in literature of social reality.

Social realism refers to the events in contemporary society. A social realistic novel presents a mirror reflection of the actual life in the contemporary society. Social realism differs from socialist realism which means the depiction of social reality not as it is but as it should be, idealized.

According to M. H. Abrams, 'Realistic novel is opposite to romantic novel.' ¹⁹

Untouchable presents the socio-economic and cultural reality of the Indian untouchables in the colonial India. An attempt is made here to illustrate this reality related to their poverty, humiliation due to deprivation of the basic human rights, their harassment and atrocities.

Untouchable portrays the realistic life, dirty life conditions, poverty, exploitation, sufferings, humiliation of Bakha and his family as they are from the sweeper community, a low caste in Hindu society, Lakha's conventional attitude to caste system, Bakha's protest against the established caste system and his suffering caused by it, as well as the need to change the existing life conditions of low castes Hindus - are realistically depicted by the author. That is why T. Anjaneyulu states,

" The novel *Untouchable* is written in the tradition of social realism. We can note social realism in its subject matter, its presentation, atmosphere, characterisation and language." ²⁰

Anand's descriptions of the outcaste colony, atmosphere in the colony, the sufferings of the outcastes and the characters including the major and minor ones are so realistic and appealing that they do not disappear even after a reader finishes the novel. K.R. Shrinivas Iyengar and Nanda Kumar observe,

"Untouchable strikes us as the picture of a place, of society and of persons not easily to be forgotten." ²¹

Poverty of Untouchables

Untouchables in the outcastes' colony of Bulandshahr are poor and humble people. The novelist describes, at various places in the novel, poverty of Bakha and his family as well as the poor conditions of their life: poor houses, poor belongings, and poor clothes. The overall appearance of the colony conveys the readers the poverty of the low castes.

The outcaste colony of Bulandshahr is a group of small houses made of mud walls in two rows outside the town and the cantonment. It is a dirty colony full of dirt and filth of public latrines. There was bad odour of the hides and skins of the dead

carcasses. The dung of donkeys and other animals was also there.

It was a marshy place. As such the colony was unsuitable for human living. The novelist rightly describes the colony as, “an uncongenial place to live in”²²

Bakha’s home is a very small place. It is a one roomed mud house; a dark and dingy place.²³

Anand describes untouchables' outcaste colony in Bulandeshahr as a place of miserable life conditions.

In the outcaste colony there was a complete absence of drainage system, which made the field boggy during rainy seasons. The rampart of the human and animal refuse was found on the outskirts of the colony. There were ugliness, the squalor and the misery everywhere in the colony.

There was no electricity in the colony. Untouchables in this colony had to live in utter darkness during nights. Anand describes the outcaste colony in the city of Bulandshahr as,

“There was no provision for lights in the sweepers streets. So most of the inhabitants compensated themselves for the lights spent in utter darkness amid the smoke of smouldering hearth fires in their small, congested houses by spending the most of their time in the open air”.²⁴

The inhabitants of the outcaste colony could not get sufficient drinking water even. They did without it. Sanitation, cleanliness and hygiene were, perhaps, not meant for them. Flies and mosquitoes were boon companions of them.

The food untouchables in the outcaste colony eat was equally bad. They survived on mere remaining. The wages and the food were also not given to them with honour. Anand describes,

“The picture of a sepoy washing his hands in his round brass tray over the leavings of bread and salad and then throwing them in Rakha’s basket appeared before him”.²⁵

The surrounding and the atmosphere in the outcastes’ colony had an adverse effect on the mind and body of the untouchables. Bakha, though strong physically, is a person of very slow pacing. His slow motion is the result of the surrounding he lives in. The author rightly says,

“His listless, lazy, lousy manner was a result of his surroundings.”²⁶

Such were the conditions of the outcaste colony then. Anand rightly comments, on the atmosphere in the colony,

“Their day was dark and their night pitch dark”²⁷

The poverty of Lakha's family is traditional. Bakha's father was jamadar of all sweepers in the town and the cantonment. But after his retirement he is too poor to look after his family as the family head. Naturally, the responsibility of running the home is thrown on Bakha. Lakha and Rakha sleep under a "patched ochre colored quilt on a broken string bed".²⁸

Bakha uses very dirty bed. He lies covered by a worn out blanket on a faded blue carpet that was spread on the floor.²⁹ Bakha has no sleeping gown. He sleeps with his day clothes on. He has inadequate blanket.

Bakha has a passion for using western clothes like Tommie but he has no money and cannot afford to buy them, so he has collected the Tommie's dress from different people and the shops selling old commodities. Bakha begs for his trousers and shoes from cantonment soldiers, as well as he buys them from rag seller's shop. The novelist directly narrates poverty of Bakha,

"He had begged one Tommy for the gift of a pair of trousers. The man had given him a pair of breeches, which he had to spare. A Hindu sepoy, for the good of his soul, had been kind enough to make an endowment of a pair of boots and puttees. For the other items, he had gone down to the rag sellers shop in the town."³⁰

The reason of his poverty lies in the fact that he is not paid fixed and sufficient wages for latrine sweeping. He offers his service in a traditional manner without money. So he has no money to buy amenities of life, as he desires in the western style.

Bakha is very happy for small donations. Charat Singh's announcement of the gift of a hockey stick surprises him and he is grateful in a conventional way to Charat Singh. He salutes Charat Singh by bending down with a smile. The novelist comments,

“A soft smile lingered on his lips, the smile of a slave overjoyed at the condescension of his master, more akin to pride than to happiness”.³¹

Humiliation of untouchables

The action of the novel is a sort of chain of selected incidents of humiliation of Bakha from the early morning to the evening. The cause of his humiliation is rooted in the conventional caste system of India. The untouchables suffered humiliation because of their low position in the Hindu Society. The higher castes always treated the low castes with disrespect and insults and inferiority. The story of Bakha represents the conventional humiliation of the low castes. There are several modes of humiliation presented in the novel.

Humiliation means, in simple words, disrespectful treatment to a human being by other human beings in which the individual dignity of the concerned is not respected. One way of humiliation is to shout out abuses to treat a person as meaningless and low. Bakha suffers humiliation when his day begins with abuses to start his work of cleaning latrines. Havildar Charat Singh gives a call to Bakha for quick latrine sweeping as he suffers from piles. But Charat Singh does not request or use polite words but abuses Bakha for delay. Charat Singh uses humiliating words as,

“Son of a sweeper’s son, a rogue, who is responsible for my piles”³²

Not only Charat Singh uses harsh words but Bakha’s father also abuses him at that time. He shouts at Bakha, “Get up, ohe you Bakhya, you son of a pig”³³

This is humiliating. Bakha is referred as ‘Bakhya’ and ‘son of a pig’ by his own father.

Similarly, Lalaji, a high caste Hindu refers to Bakha as low caste vermin, swine, cockeyed son of a low legged scorpion etc. when accidentally Bakha touches him. Lalaji forces him to announce his approach in the road in the conventional manner, is a humiliation of Bakha being a latrine sweeper. After Lalaji’s instruction, Bakha starts announcing his approach,

“Posh, keep away, posh, Sweeper coming. Posh, posh, sweeper coming”³⁴

After this insulting, Bakha feels completely humiliated. He is disturbed mentally. As a result, he starts announcing his approach in the street.

Sickness was the integral part of the life of untouchables as they lived in the dirtiest places, almost uncongenial places to live in.

Not only upper caste Hindus, priests insulted the untouchables but also the doctors treated them in the most inhuman way. Mulk Raj Anand narrates one incident from the life of Bakha when he was a child and fighting with death in his ailment. That time Bakha's father Lakha had gone to the Hakimji [doctor] and requested him to come to see his son and give him proper medicines to save his life. There too Lakha could not enter the medicine house (dispensary) of Hakimji. He stood at a considerable distance from the medicine house and requested every passer by to make his message reach the ears of Hakimji. But in return he received only humiliating words.

“Keep away, keep away --- Don't come riding on at me. Do you want me to have another bath this morning? The Hakim sahib has to attend to us people who go to offices first. And there are so many of us waiting. You have nothing to do all day. Come another time or wait”.³⁵

God created both, the sahib and the sweeper. Both of them have the same red blood, running in their veins. Still the life of a Sahib who goes to the office is more precious than the life of a sweeper boy. Lakha was completely helpless. He had in his eyes the picture of his dying child. He had money to spare for the medicines, which were also available in the medicine house. But he could not get them because he was an untouchable, a latrine cleaner.

He showed his readiness to do anything to save his child's life. When he narrates the incident to Bakha, he tells him,

“I would place my head at their feet and ask them to tell Hakim. But who would then listen to a sweeper? Everyone was concerned about himself”³⁶

Nothing can be more humiliating than seeing one's own child lying on deathbed. Lakha's condition was very critical when Bakha was counting his last moments. Lakha narrates his own condition in his own words,

“For an hour I stood like that in a corner, near the heap of litter which I had collected and I was feeling as if a scorpion was stinging me. That I wouldn't buy medicine for my son when I was willing to pay my hard earned money for it, troubled me. I had seen many bottles full of medicine in

the house of Hakimji and I knew that one of those bottles contained the medicine for you and yet I couldn't get it. My heart was with you and my body was outside the house of the Hakim. I had torn my heart away from the room where you lay with your mother, and prayed to God to make my difficulty easy. But nothing happened."³⁷

Lakha himself was a human being with a human heart within a human body. He had deep love for his son and was ready to do anything to save his son's life. But Hakim did not come to his help. After waiting for a long time, he directly ran into the room of Hakimji. He prayed to the Hakim that there was still some breath in his child's body. He assured the Hakim to be his slave for all his life and entreated him to take pity on his son for the sake of God. But in return he could receive only humiliation. Instead of taking pity on him people shouted, "Bhangi! bhangi!"³⁸ to see him in the medical house.

Even the Hakim, who is supposed to have an equal eye for all and in whose eye, all patients are but patients and nothing else, and whose religion (duty) is to save the life of the patient, also turned red and pale and shouted at the highest pitch of his voice,

“Chandal [low caste], by whose order have you come here? ----- You have polluted hundreds of rupees worth medicines. Will you pay for it?”³⁹

For the Hakim more important than the life of a patient were his medicines because the patient was a poor sweeper boy. At last, Hakim went to Lakha's house and saved Bakha's life. But that is a different matter.

When Bakha was on deathbed, he was abused. But when he saves someone's life, then also he is abused. Bakha lifts the injured boy, who is hurt by Ram Charan's bad throw of stone while playing, and takes him to his house. The boy's mother, on seeing Bakha face to face, instead of showing gratitude to Bhakha, abuses him,

“You eater of your masters, you dirty sweeper, what have you done to my child?”⁴⁰

To the wounded boy's mother, Bakha's humanitarian approach has no meaning at all. More important to her is her house. So she scolds Bakha, “You have defiled my house besides wounding my son”.⁴¹

Everybody suppresses him because of his low social status. Upper class people treat him in humiliating manner. Humiliation itself has become his life. Though he cleans the dirt of the village, he himself has become the cause of pollution in the society. He pollutes houses; temples, people and everything

wherever he goes and whatever he touches. The incidents that take place on the day prepare Bakha's mind to accept the fact, though unwillingly. Finally, in a deep hatred he utters,

“I am a sweeper, sweeper, untouchable, untouchable, untouchable. That is the word 'untouchable'. I am an untouchable”.⁴²

Bakha's utterance of these words expresses his feelings of contempt for untouchability as a human being.

Exploitation of Untouchables

Alongwith humiliation, harassment and inhuman treatment, the untouchables were exploited by the so-called sawarnas. In The Oxford English Dictionary of Current English, the word exploitation is defined as "to treat a person or situation as an opportunity to gain an advantage for yourself."⁴³ 'To exploit' means 'to use or treat somebody in unfair and selfish manner for one's own advantage'. Exploitation, in simple words, is employment without wages or with meagre wages. In *Untouchable*, the exploitation is of social kind. In this novel the social exploitation is mostly religion based.

The caste system is based on the division of labour in the Hindu religion. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas looked down upon the lower castes. Untouchables worked for the upper castes without wages often for a crust of bread. They

could not deny the work assigned to their caste. They were, in fact, the beasts of burden.

In this novel, Lalaji, the household lady, Pandit Kalinath all exploit the untouchables in this way or that.

Economic exploitation is the most common mode of exploitation and the untouchables fell prey to it. The so-called sawarnas did not pay proper wages for the service the untouchables did for them. In *Untouchable*, two incidents of economic exploitation are narrated. After insulting Bakha in the street, Lalaji refers to the sweepers at his home who demanded two rupees a month instead of one rupee. Lalaji did not like it. Lalaji's dislike for his sweeper's demand is the indication of the same.

Ganesh Lal, a bania also took undue advantage of Lakha's illiteracy, his low social position and dire need of money. He charged compound interest on the money Lakha had borrowed from him for Bakha's mother's funeral. This also indicates the economic exploitation of the untouchables by the sawarnas.

Sexual Exploitation of the untouchables is a part of their social exploitation. To satisfy his lust, Pandit Kalinath takes undue advantage of helplessness of Sohini due to her low social status and holds her by her breasts in the lavatory. It is possible for him because of Sohini's lower social position. More striking is in stead of being beaten due to his higher social status, Pandit

Kali Nath receives sympathy of the worshippers in the temple who shout at Bakha,

“Get off the steps, you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service. You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down. Get away, you dog!”⁴⁴

Bakha knows from Sohini that Kalinath tried to molest her. He becomes furious but his condition is like a bird with broken wings. Anand describes his condition and the reason aptly,

“He could not overstep the barriers which the conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weakness against him. He could not invade the magic circle which protects a priest from attack by anybody, especially by a low caste man.”⁴⁵

The author suggests that Pandit Kalinath has the protection provided by the religion.

Bakha's father also accepts this fact. When he learns about the incident, he consoles Bakha and tries to make him aware of the reality thus,

“No, no, my son, no, we can't do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs

is sufficient to overbalance all that we might say before the police.”⁴⁶

The landlady also exploits Bakha. She gives enough food with respect to the Sadhu for doing nothing at all. But she does not give bread to Bakha with respect. She minds giving bread to Bakha though he himself and his family render sincere service to her. She exploits him for his minor mistake. She hesitates to give him bread which is his right. Raged with anger, she asks Bakha,

“What have you done to earn your food to-day, you or your sister? She never cleaned the lane this morning and you have defiled my home. Come, clean the drain a bit and then you can have this bread. Come, do a bit of work now that you have defiled my home”.⁴⁷

It is Bakha’s right to get bread from the landlady for the services he renders. But in return he gets only abuses. Instead of giving bread in his hand, she throws it at him from the upper floor and shouts,

“Vay Bakhya, take this. Here's your bread coming down.”⁴⁸

The bread comes down in a dust and Bakha picks it up quietly and wraps it in a duster with other bread.

It happens only because of Bakha's low social position.

Lalaji and Ganesh Lal exploit the untouchables economically. Pandit Kali Nath exploits Sohini sexually and the landlady exploits Bakha socially and economically. This exploitation of his caste people tortures Bakha mentally and spiritually.

According to Ambujkumar Sharma, 'the social exploitation, in this novel is the offspring of religious conservatism. He gives an example in support of his statement. When Bakha accidentally happens to touch the body of Lalaji, he abuses Bakha and expresses his desire to take bath to purify himself. This desire of Lalaji proclaims his religious conservatism.⁴⁹

Religious conservatism comes to surface again when the worshippers in the temple of Shanti Deva hold that "a temple can be polluted, according to the Holy Books, by a low caste man coming within sixty nine yards of it."⁵⁰ Again their religious conservatism is clearly brought out when they proclaim the need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify themselves and their shrine.⁵¹ If an untouchable touches or climbs the steps of the temple the temple is polluted and when the temple is polluted, the caste Hindus are almost "runied".⁵²

Anand employs a tool of irony to depict the contradictory social affairs. When Bakha happens to touch Lala, his touch to Lala is supposed to be pollution. But when Lala slaps Bakha, he willingly touches Bakha for the action is not possible without touch. But Lala's touch to Bakha is not supposed 'pollution'.

Similarly, when the priest in charge of a temple, a religious person in Hindu society willingly holds an untouchable girl, his religion is not polluted; he is not ruined. But a temple is polluted by a low caste man standing on the step of the temple. This is ironical.

Saros Cowasjee rightly comments in this connection,

" Since the social impulse is at the heart of Anand's writing, he finds irony which works largely through contrasting appearance with reality."⁵³

It is not true that only high caste Hindus exploited the low caste ones for their own ends. Even the low caste people also tried to exploit the lower caste ones. Sohini's social position is the lowest among the low. Gulabo, Waziro, Sohini all are the low caste women and all of them come to collect water at the foot of the caste Hindus' well and depend on the mercy of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers. But Gulabo thinks of herself superior to every other outcast woman, because she claims a high place in the hierarchy of castes among the low castes.⁵⁴ She expects respect from Sohini. She looks down upon Sohini because of her being of the lowest caste among the out caste. Not only the caste Hindus abuse the outcastes, but the outcastes also abuse each other. When Sohini laughs at Gulabo, she gets annoyed. She abuses Sohini using dirty words,

“Think of it! Think of it! You bitch! You prostitute! wanton! And your mother hardly dead. Think of laughing in my face, laughing at me who am old enough to be your mother. Bitch!”⁵⁵

She calls Sohini bitch, prostitute, and wanton. Sohini tolerates this quietly. But Sohini’s silence even annoys Gulabo and she shouts dirtiest words at Sohini,

“You annoy me with your silence, you illegally begotten! You eater of dung and drinker of urine! You bitch of a sweeper woman! I will show you how to insult one old enough to be your mother”.⁵⁶

Not only the high caste Hindus considered the sight and touch of a sweeper as inauspicious but also the low caste Hindu considered the same. Gulabo complains against Sohini that on the holy day of her daughter’s marriage, Sohini started her auspicious day so badly.⁵⁷

The exploitation and the harassment of the untouchables is a result of not only of the religious orthodoxy of the high caste Hindus but also untouchables' blind faith in tradition.

Deprivation of Fundamental Human Rights of Untouchables

Untouchables were deprived of fundamental human rights in Hindu Society. Education, good food, good shelter, clothing and pure and sufficient drinking water are the basic needs of man. Without them human life is miserable. Untouchables were deprived of these basic needs.

The protagonist craves for learning. His uncle at British barracks had told him, he had to learn to read and write in a school to be a sahib. Then, Bakha had wept and cried to be allowed to go to school. But his low caste was the obstacle in his joining the school. According to Lakha, "the schools are meant for the babus and not for the lowly sweepers."⁵⁸ There were no schools for sweepers' children. They were not admitted to any school because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of the low castes.⁵⁹ Instead of going to school, he had started to work at the latrines at the age of six. There were broom and basket in his hands instead of a bag of books. This was misery of Bakha.

Bakha is not paid proper wages. He has only work and no adequate return in the form of wages. This is against his fundamental right to work and right to proper wages.

Rain showered everywhere in the town including the outcaste colony. But the untouchables were unable to get drinking water.

Sohini goes to fetch water for Bakha's tea at the public well not meant for untouchables. She has to wait alongwith other untouchables for some sawarnas to come and provide her water from the well. She, being a low caste, cannot herself lift the water from the well. If she does lift it, it is supposed to be water-pollution.

Good and sufficient food was also not given to the untouchables. The food given to them in return of their service to the society was insufficient and stale. After the land lady throws a 'Chapati' at Bakha, Bakha laments,

"How can I go home with two chapaties under my arms".⁶⁰

For clothing, Bakha has to depend upon various people and on the raggs seller's shop for his trousers. He wears worn-out clothes. He spends his nights in a patched orche coloured quilt. He has no sufficient bedding.

Good and sufficient shelter or housing is a matter beyond the reach of the untouchables. Lakha's family has four members, but only one room that serves as a kitchen, bedroom and everything in the house. They live in twelve feet by five feet, dark, dingy, one roomed mud house.

Basically, Anand is a humanitarian writer who believes in the dignity of an individual. Anything that results in suppression of any human being is disliked by the author.

The set pattern of caste system is a thing that comes in the way of untouchables to emerge as respectable members of the society.

G. S. Balarama Gupta rightly comments on Anand's humanism,

"The most important doctrine of Anand's humanism that finds clear amplification in *Untouchable* is, however, rejection of castism as a cruel evil, the practice of which results in suppression of untouchables who are denied their fundamental right to grow into respectable citizens of society."⁶¹

Mulk Raj Anand's compassion for untouchables

The hallmark of *Untouchable* is Mulk Raj Anand's sincere compassion for untouchables, for their humiliation, poverty, exploitation and harassment in Hindu Society. In addition, he feels sorry that Lakha's generation of untouchables is not aware of their own miserable life as their mental set up is full of traditional acceptance of the miserable life style of untouchables.

Anand tells Bakha's story and Bakha's frustration being a low caste sweeper in such a way that he creates similar compassion in the minds of the readers. It is to be noted that Anand belongs to the sawarna class. But Gandhian influence made him see untouchables' life in Hindu society with humanism. He selects, therefore, the hero of his novel from a sweeper caste which is known as 'lowest of the low' caste from the untouchables. The purpose behind the novel is to show the real miseries of the sweepers, so that the Hindu society will realise in proper perspectives what kind of wretched life the untouchables lead. Bakha's miseries represent the miseries of all untouchables. The theme becomes universal. Anand, being a humanist, believes in the slogan; "treat man as a man" and not like a beast of burden. G. S. Balarama Gupta comments in this regard thus,

"Anand's humanism places man in the centre of all things. It also believes in the ethical quality of all men. Therefore it cannot sanction any distinction between men, say, divisions of caste, creed and race which are positive obstacles for human beings to grow to their full height and dignity."⁶²

Bakha's frustration in the midst of the novel symbolizes the traditional frustration of untouchables from pretty long past in

Hindu society in India. In this way, he creates utmost sympathy in the minds of the readers for Bakha and through Bakha for all untouchables. He effectively creates the necessary impact and conveys how untouchability in Hindu society is not only wrong but also inhuman. Anand is successful in his motive of writing the novel and the credit of entire success of *Untouchable* goes to Anand's sincere compassion for untouchables as well as creation of the same sincere compassion in his readers.

C. D. Narasimhaiah atly observes,

"Rightly hailed as a classic and a remarkable technical feat, *Untouchable* is a simple yet powerful work, and its power is mainly due to the author's sincerity."⁶³

Anand not only presents the problem of untouchables realistically but he suggests three remedies to solve the problem in future, viz(1) conversion to Christianity, for Hindu religion is the cause of untouchability, (2) Gandhian thoughts on emancipation of traditional untouchability with broader humanism and (3) the invention of 'flush system' to end the latrine sweepers' work.

T. Anjaneyulu states,

" Bakha's problem revolves around cleaning the latrines. The solutions proposed- Christ, Gandhi and the Machine give some hopeful conclusion to this novel

of protest against the sorrowful plight of the untouchables." ⁶⁴

Anand suggests the remedies as visionary novelist but more than that they come out from his sincere thinking on the problem and sincere compassion for the outcastes and his spiritual morality that construct his mental set up. Anand's mental and moral construct does not permit him to ignore the burning social facts. In this regard, A. V. Krishna Rao's comment grips the readers' attention,

" His (Anand's) concern is to prove the need for reform in order to achieve a real social amelioration, controlling the mechanistic operation of the all material causes that determine the human destiny " ⁶⁵

In brief, this novel is the representation of the agonies and pains, humiliation and harassment atrocities and exploitation on a single day in the life of the protagonist. It gives us the true picture of the outcaste colony and the miserable living conditions of the poor and humble untouchables. It also shows the author's sincere compassion for them and his sincere desire for the removal of untouchability. He has made honest efforts to represent the realistic picture of the untouchables during the Pre-Independence period in the novel.

CHAPTER - II

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