

CHAPTER – IV
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This concluding chapter states in brief some of the findings as a result of the comparative study of two selected novels viz. *Untouchable* in English by Mulk Raj Anand and *Bahishkrut* in Marathi by Arun Sadhu on the lives of untouchables in the Hindu society in India on the theme of untouchability. This thematic study concentrates on the actual living conditions of the untouchables, their poverty, their exploitations and humiliation by the other upper castes, imposing on untouchables, definite social taboos resulting in the miseries of the untouchables.

The caste system in the Hindus in India is a typical traditional social system and also a blot on the Hindu society. The history of the origin and development of caste system has a long past history. It is said that the caste system in Hindus in India is a gift of 'Manusmruti'. The word 'caste' is a derived word in English from the Portuguese word 'casta' meaning 'breed'. Indian Hindu society is subdivided into castes and sub-castes to such extent that the entire social life of Hindus totally depends on one's own caste and its customs. Many have tried to define caste in their own ways. However, the origin of caste belongs to the old past around 2350 B.C. when there was encounter of native Dravidians to the migrated Aryans. The Vedic culture divided the Hindu society into four groups or classes known

as 'Chaturvarnas' based on the merits and social duties of a class or varna. Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya were superior varnas to the Shudra varna in every respect. In the course of time, the shudra was treated as the lowest varna and it was its duty to serve the other three varnas. The shudras were imposed on so many social taboos and assigned ugly and low type of menial works and were treated in utter inhuman manner so that the shudras remained as the beasts of burden.

This situation continued over centuries and the conditions of shudras became more deplorable and wretched. They were denied the basic human rights and they were deprived of dignity and necessities of life. So they remained backward – socially and economically.

These untouchable were regarded as depressed classes. Many social workers during the colonial period, realizing the worst conditions of the untouchables, took efforts to uplift the untouchables in their economic and social status and to remove untouchability from Indian society. The work of the reformists such as Mahatma Phule, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur State and Mahatma Gandhi in this regard is noteworthy. In addition, the encounter of the Eastern culture with the Western culture created awareness about what was wrong in the traditional attitude to untouchables. This awareness gave rise to literature on untouchables written by both dalits and non-dalits. Literature by dalits on their lives is their cry

and self-revelation and assertion of their agonies. However, Dalit literature by non-dalits is a creation of their sincere compassion for untouchables and their earnest desire to end untouchability and miserable life of untouchables.

The present study is confined to two novels on the lives of untouchables viz. *Untouchable* in English by Mulk Raj Anand written around 1933 and published in 1935 and *Bahishkrut* in Marathi by Arun Sadhu published in 1978. These novels are selected with a specific purpose and for certain reasons though their common theme is untouchability and miserable life of untouchables in Hindu society. An attempt has been made to discover how attitude to untouchability and untouchables has been deeply rooted in the social mind of Hindus in the nook and corner of India. So that the efforts to eradicate untouchability are often futile and meaningless.

Untouchable is written by a Kshatriya from Punjab State in a North India while *Bahishkrut* is written by another upper class man from Maharashtra in South India. Mulk Raj Anand, under the influence of Gandhian thought, was aware of the miserable life of untouchables. He wrote the novel during his stay in 'Sabarmati Ashram' around 1933. His protagonist i.e. Bakha belongs to a latrine sweeper class i.e. 'Bhangi'. Gandhiji considered a latrine sweeper as the most wretched man who had to carry human waste on his head. Mulk Raj Anand's hero is a 'bhangi' who is described as 'lowest of the low'. So Gandhian thought inspired Mulk Raj Anand to write the novel on a latrine sweeper. However, Arun Sadhu's inspiration to

write *Bahishkrut* comes from his personal observation of death tolls of poor untouchables who were denied water during the famine in and around 1974. Arun Sadhu witnessed the bitter fatal reality of wretched life of untouchables in spite of growing awareness and legal provisions to end all social taboos on the untouchables. It means that both the writers had genuine natural inspiration to write on the untouchables life. *Untouchable* was written during the Pre-Independence period on the life of an untouchable when the traditional untouchability was worse compared to the legacy of untouchability during the Post-Independence period when *Bahishkrut* was written by Arun Sadhu. But both the novels trace and stress that Hindu social mind is always in favour of untouchability. The only difference is the intensity and the level of untouchability. Even in the recent past, many news were published about the atrocities inflicted on the untouchables for minor reasons such as marriage of untouchable boy with a sawarna girl, trivial disputes between untouchables and sawarnas in the progressive state of Maharashtra. The first novel is written in English while the later is in Marathi but the medium of the language brings no difference in the expression of the effects of untouchability on the lives of untouchables. The subject matter is highlighted by both the writers, so that both novels are touching and creating deep impression on the readers.

The action in *Untouchable* is located to Bulandshar, a cantonment town in Punjab. The place of action is natural for

encounter of the East and the West due to cantonment area. It has traditionality in the old area of the town and modernity in the cantonment area. This provides Bakha, the protagonist, to have a view of both traditionality and modernity. He inclines towards modernity and is aware of the miseries of his own and other untouchables. Because of this awareness he considers the occurrences in his daily life as a humiliation. So he raises his voice against the same humiliated life before his father. But Lakha, his father, defends the traditional caste-system and untouchability and pacifies Bakha. This brings tremendous frustration in Bakha. But the protagonist Mr. Ingale is aware of his rights owing to his education. He himself has experienced humiliation and exploitation being an untouchable child. The place of action of *Bahishkrut* is Ridgaon, a small village in Maharashtra.

The protagonist of *Untouchable* is an uneducated youth of eighteen who aspires for learning but has no education. He is forcefully tied to his traditional latrine sweeping work against his will but he is sincere and faithful to that work. The protagonist of *Bahishkrut* is an educated young man who is appointed as a teacher in a high school. Mr. Ingale has a good social status eventhough he is an untouchable. Like Bakha he is also a lover of education and is fortunate to continue his education even after the job.

Both the novels depict the poverty of untouchables, their unhealthy colonies in the outskirts, their humiliation and exploitation on the same lines. Both the writers are successful in conveying the

readers that the major cause of their poverty and humiliated life is their birth and upbringing in untouchables' families. They both are ill-treated by the society because they are untouchables. Both of the protagonists are fed up with the social taboos forced against them and both try to rebel against this. Bakha was unsuccessful but Mr. Ingale wins in his rebel and succeeds to open the village well to untouchables but at the cost of three victims from untouchable community. The outcasts in *Untouchable* also face the problem of drinking water, but they tolerate it with accepting the tradition of not to fetch water themselves. But Ingale and his followers agitate and struggle desperately for water from the village-well taking the model of Ambedkar's 'Chavdar Tale Satyagraha'. Bakha is sorry for being a sweeper. Similarly, Ashok Ingale has the same feeling. Their miseries are common. Bakha is insulted every now and then in his social life and he is disheartened. Ingale has the same experience. Bakha faces exploitation while Ingale gets a good job. Bakha's sister Sohini is on the verge of sexual exploitation when a priest tries to molest her. Ashok Ingale's mother becomes a victim of the sexual lust of an upper caste man. So the experience of poverty and humiliation and exploitation is common to both protagonists. Both of them are nervous for their aforesaid life experiences. The only surprising difference is that Ashok Ingale experiences humiliation even after the untouchables have got equal social status by law. Nobody protests against Ingale openly as Mahar but all of them

directly or indirectly refer to that Ingale is appointed as a teacher because he belongs to Mahar community.

The financial conditions of untouchables are same in both novels. Even after freedom the economic conditions of untouchables are the same. The description of outcast colony in *Bahishkrut* is more or less the replica of the outcast colony described in *Untouchable*. The separate back benches allotted to the untouchable students in Ridgaon school shows the continued traditional treatment of untouchability to the untouchable students. Mr. and Mrs. Kulkarni's comments on Ingale as a person from Mahar community and Mr. Deshmukh's attitude to him as a Mahar shows that in the villages the untouchability continues in the concealed form even today. Such instances explain us how mentally Hindus are unhealthy in continuing untouchability in their minds.

Though both the novels portray stories of woes in two untouchable protagonists' lives, the writers are not pessimistic. Both the novels end with rays of hopes. Bakha is happy in the end of the novel when he learns about the invention of the 'flush latrine machine' which will end his dirty work and his miseries. Similarly, Mr. Ingale succeeds in his mission of opening the village well to all the untouchables with equal rights with sawarnas. Ingale provides a solution to the progress of untouchable students after Phule's and Ambedkar's thoughts. He inspires them to take education which will end their miserable life. So both the writers suggest optimistically solutions to end untouchability and improve the life of untouchables.

The milieu in *Untouchable* and that in *Bahishkrut* are different. *Untouchable* concentrates on the reformist period when Gandhiji was doing the social work of ending untouchability. At that time, the minds of sawarnas had traditional set-up having no impact of Gandhian thoughts. The sawarnas never thought that they were doing something wrong to untouchables. Untouchability, they considered, was natural and rational. But the milieu in *Bahishkrut* is different. It is Post-Independence milieu when the untouchables enjoyed the fruits of social reforms and concessions and reservation in jobs due to the laws for overall improvement of untouchables. Though an untouchable such as Ingale becomes a teacher, he is not treated as a teacher equal to other teachers. First he is a Mahar and then a teacher to sawarnas. It means that the new law ended untouchability outwardly and brought materially good days to untouchables in free India, yet the law can not remove their untouchability, deeply rooted in the minds of Hindus. Ingale has to struggle hard and desperately for fetching water from the village well to establish common right of untouchables on the same. The villagers, under the instructions of Deshmukh, inflict atrocities on untouchables who are trying to establish their right to water. The village becomes a battle-field between untouchables and others for getting water by untouchables.

The present study therefore concludes that the social eradication of untouchability is artificially possible but the eradication of untouchability from Hindu minds is not that possible.