

The ‘Untouchable’ – An exemplar of revolutionary voice against ‘Untouchability’ in Post colonial perspectives

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Abstract

This article throws light Mulk Raj Anand’s effective narration of a scavenger who has been ill treated in the society where he is belonged to through his novel ‘Untouchable’. It also mentions opinions, suggestions and instructions of the social reformers as well Mahatma in order to eradicate ‘Untouchability’ which is a predominant social evil routed in Indian soil during pre independence India. It also highlights owes of Bakha being an out casted in the same village and who struggles constantly with unanswerable questions about discrimination in the society. It also observes predominance of so called Hindu-caste and their humiliated nature towards their fellow beings. This research also brings out remedies to prevent this evil and significance of oneness among people on the same soil.

Key words: *untouchability, scavengers, reformers, social evil, pre independence and discrimination.*

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand is a novelist with a strong social commitment. One of the close studies his works mirrors that he colligates the social evils against the stubborn mindsets of individuals and some privileged sections of the society. In his novel ‘Untouchable’ he had mainly dealt with the awful evil of ‘Untouchability’ affecting the Hindu society of the pre-partition era in the larger mis-en-scene of the caste-configurations within the Hindu society that have successfully choked the healthy growth of a considerable section of Indian community for centuries.

It is originally titled as ‘Bakha’ but Anand’s sojourn at Mahatma Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram. It was narrated to Mahatma by Anand. On the advice of Gandhi, it was précised to hundred pages, especially passages related to Baka’s thinking, dreaming and brooding like a ‘Bloomsbury intellectual’. Including these suggestions and revising the plot form the subtlety of a novelist rather than a pamphleteer.

It is apt to mention about routes of caste system in India because it is existed from ancient times based on the profession people had respectively taken up in the society. There are five castes in Hinduism. They are Brahmin (represents priestly caste), Kshatriya(represents Warriors caste),Vaishya(belongs to merchants) Shudra (Worker caste) and ultimately, the ‘Untouchables’ are people in the society responsible for tasks such as cleaning toilets, handling waste and disposing of carcasses.

Anand had intellectually portrayed wickedness of the society through Bakha in this novel. He had found himself in a social position where his touch was considered as filth for an upper caste gentleman yet he was at their services. Being a human being like him and a male diction as ell touching dirty bull like the one he had seen just then had a benediction. After a series of agonizing experiences of touching in the market, Bakha walked towards sweeping the temple courtyard. He was completely filled with an unknown fear of someone and mysterious effect on him when he entered into temple courtyard. He used to introspect himself about parities he had seen in the village towards families of surviving on Scavenge.

Anand had exploited radical voice of Bakha but his faith towards God was also highlighted in the novel. The protagonist Bakha introspected himself that untouchable were not allowed to enter in the temple premises whereas they were utilized to clean dust and leaves in courtyard of the temple. He tried to caution the people about the sight of the snake but he found some orthodox crowd of worshippers started chanting different names of God and Goddesses. It astonished him of their singing joyfully with much devotion. It moved him also to join his hands to worship of the unknown God.

The author displayed the double standard of society where on one set of people polluted by the shadow of untouchable on the other they don’t hesitate to put efforts to molest the untouchable girl Sohini. All of sudden Bakha and other the gathering had heard a loud cry “polluted, polluted, polluted. He was confounded for what the cry was meant for. He found a little man , a priest of the temple, stumbling, falling and crying that the temple was

polluted. The crowd simply began to run helter-skelter though no one was aware of what had happened for his embarrassing behavior in the public. One of them among the crowd blamed Bakha unnecessarily that he defiled their entire devotional service to God. He didn't heed them instead ran down the steps and went to his sister Sohini. The little priest outburst at sister and brother that he was defiled by their touch whereas the temple and the crowd are from a distance. To his dismay, Bakha saw that the crowd was showering sympathy on the priest who really desired to molest Sohini. But she rejected his wild behavior. Keeping in this mind, the priest tried to outrage her modesty in public

The real irony is laid in Bakha's high determination to take revenge being frustrated by futility written on his face by the God whom he had heard from higher caste people in his village. His radical thoughts were against the caste men who had erected barriers of convention to safeguard their excess from being questioned. The writer obsesses Bakha as a tiger, but a tiger at bay. Bakha had much care and love for his sister Sohini. He was worried about her safety when he had learnt about pandit Kali Nath's vulgar behavior with Sohini.

Bakha once again condemned his villagers mean behavior towards him in Sadhu's incident. The housewife attended dotingly nearly a Sadhu and offered him food with great reverence. It is completely contrary in his case. He had to wait for long hours in front of her house for a piece of bread which he obtained it with rebukes and abuses. A question continuously torments his mind about accepting left over or defiled food offered by villagers belonging to high caste. They never treat them as human beings instead an obedient suppressed dog who had to fold his hands and bend his head before them for no reason.

The writer invested efforts successfully to show that problem of untouchable could be removed. When the dusk approached he found three solutions to his pestering problems. He determined to convert himself into a Christian with the help of Hutchinson, the Salvation Army missionary. He found himself happy to hear from Hutchinson that Christ receives all men with same love. He never shows difference between a Brahmin and a Bhangi. The second solution is to take himself comfort in Gandhiji's chastisement of the caste Hindus and await till the social conscience of people is roused. The third solution is hard upon him that he put his faith in the water-closet about which the positivist poet had spoken like prosaic, uncomplicated and contemplated in the light of what had gone before in the book. It is a convincing phrase that No god is need to save the untouchables no vows of self-sacrifice and an inconvenience on the part of much fortunate Indians.

Pramila Paul states that The novel is indeed a presentation of Anand's attempt at purifying a social metaphor which takes in its sweep an entire range of postulates of Hindu culture. She denotes that it is a kind of dialectical work centered on as exploration of feasibilities of achievements which synthesis or spiritual restoration.

Mahatma on 'Varna System 'in India

According to Mahatma ' Varansrama satisfies the religious, social and economic needs of community. It satisfies the religious needs because a whole community accepting the law is free to devote ample time to spiritual perfection. Observance of the law obviates social evils and entirely prevents the killing economic competition. And if it is regarded as a law lying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it, but their duties it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth though it may not be ideal, i.e., strictly equal, distribution.'

Harijana-4-3'38p.

In the words of Mzumdar & Madan "Caste is a closed class such as people based on property, business, occupation. i.e., one can't change his own caste system by can change the class system and can be a member of many classes at the same time'.

Charles Coole commented that 'A class is somewhat strictly hereditary; we may call it a caste'.

E. Blunt points out that 'Caste is endogamous group hereditary, imposing on its members certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse, either following a common traditional occupation claiming a common origin and generally regarded as forming a single homogeneous community '.

Desolation of Bakha in the novel

Anand had strikingly depicted in the novel the miserable lot of the unfortunate untouchables and advised that they could be freed from the restraints of killing orthodoxy and tradition only if men pervade into their own hearts some sympathy and tenderness and if the men who are badly humiliated as pariahs gather enough courage to live boldly and healthily.

Anand creatively sketches the harsh reality of Hindu society which was got divided into various pigeonholes due to the narrow mindsets and arrogance of the so called upper castes and to the dismay of this democratic society, it was encouraged in many possible ways instead of condemning it and prevent it from its routes. E.M. Foster commented on this aspect in his preface to untouchable:

The Sweeper (Untouchable in this case) is worse off than a slave for the slave may change his master and his duties and even become free, but sweeper is found forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and consolations of his religion (U, p. 6-7)

The opening paragraph of the novel shows the 'Big Divide' between the untouchables and other resident communities in the town. Anand generally expressed his anguish for the inhuman way the untouchables are treated by those that belong to superior castes as he strongly believed in the dignity of man and equality of all men.

He projects degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate sections of society through owes of 'Bakha' whose arrival into the village is yelled as 'Posh, Posh, Sweeper is coming'! By himself in order to refrain people to ill treat him. He narrated pathetic incident involved Bakha without his intervention generally make the readers of Untouchable novel to question themselves about this social discrimination and ill treatment of fellow beings. Bakha is the son of 'Lakha' who is 'Jemadar' of the sweepers in the town and the cantonment.

Laka has daughter Sohini and Rakha an younger son who are already at the services of the villagers and leading their lives at the mercy of them. Sohini cleans surroundings of the temple and cleaning at priest's home yet she is not allowed into the temple and ill treated by the priest.

It is piteous that the out casted people had to wait for many hours to get drinking water for the generosity of some caste-Hindu to pour water in their empty pitchers because they were restricted to mount the surrounding of the well in the town of Bulandshahar and it is called as 'the caste-well'.

Soliloquy of Bakha

Bakha, the innocent who was weird of his position in this so called caste dominated society purchased a mouth watering jalebi but lost its taste before tasted it due to invasion of abusive epithets and physical assault on him by a Brahmin. This unexpected thrash against was occurred as he played hockey with two boys of the Hindu babu. And he unconsciously touched him while tried to eat the portion of Jalebi. This situation razed to the extent that a great crowd gathered round to see what the row is about this and encouraged the aggrieved man further in his denunciations. At this juncture, Anand describes his misery, hopelessness and helplessness in the following words.

"He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. And he could already hear in his ears the abuse that he would thus draw on himself." (U,P:52)

A mohammedan Tonga –wallah who drew sympathy of miserable Bakha and he infuriated the 'Touched Man'. This wretched incident makes him indulge in pitiable self analysis of his plight in this interior monologue:

Why was all this fuss?

"Why didn't I shout to warn the people of m approach couldn't I have joined my hands to him and this gone away. The slap on my face! The Coward!" (U, P: 56)

At the end of this novel, the writer seems to suggest a few solutions to this evil 'Untouchability'. One of these alludes to the efforts being put by Christian missionaries through their local Salvation Army. Colonel Hutchinson answers to Bakha of his constant questions and he seems to feel that in Christianity there is no difference between the Pundit of the morning who considered himself defiled and polluted by his touch and a sweeper- boy or bhangi like him though his questions are answered yet he cannot bring himself accepting conversion to Christianity for the sake of equality.

Gandhi regards untouchability as 'the great bolt on Hinduism' (U, P, 161) and implores the Harijans to accept the grain instead of leftover food. He also announces that all public wells, temples, roads, schools should be declared for the untouchables.

R.N. Bashir an advocate and his young poet friend Iqbal Sarashar suggested to introduce the flush system then the sweepers can be free from stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status. (U,P,162)

Anand records everyday activities of Bakha's life which show as reflection of his pathetic condition of the untouchables who are considered as the lower stratum of society in the caste-ridden orthodox Hindu society during the pre-partition lines.

The plot of 'Untouchable' is symbolized as a linear in form and simple in content is probably one of the best experimental plots in the elementary stage of Indian novel in English. Many social reformers and prominent leaders of India fought against untouchability and caste discrimination. They propagated several ways to eradicate this social evil since pre independence thought out India. With the advent of Constitution written by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, under Article 17 the practice of untouchability is abolished and it has been observed since 1955 in India.

Bakha had praised for his confront nature and estimated double standard behavior of people all whenever he had faced bitter experiences with them. though he had great interest in studying yet he was thrown away in the name of Bhangi. But his intuition which is an inborn quality motivated him to assess attitude of the people who behave like wolf in cow's skin hurt him deeply. He disagreed to touch leftovers of food offered to him by a cringe housewife as

it was chewed by her son. To his surprise, his brother and father consumed it out of their hunger and greed for food. He took pity on them as well he was furious of their filthy behavior to accept themselves at the mercy of high caste men. A determined Bakha walked towards the dawn of a transformation.

Conclusion:

India is multicultural country and known as a sub continent in Asia has unity in diversity, tolerance, non-violence and oneness as its pillars. In contrast to this there are social evils like untouchability, economical parities, caste discrimination and gender bias existed among people. Such differentiations have been wiping off by education, technology and awareness of equal rights and equality among people. it is privilege to mention a sloka represents harmony and peace from Bhagavadgita which is heart and soul of India.

Manah Prasadah Sowmyathwam Mounamatmah Vinigrah!

Bhvasamshuddi rithyetathpo Maansamuchyayathe!

Peace and tranquility of the mind, harmony and confidence in oneself, love caring and gentleness towards other and purity of the heart are all the elements which create harmony of the mind without parities or differences.

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