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Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable: A Voice of an Outcast

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Mulk Raj Anand is one of the pioneers of Indo -Anglian fiction. He was born in a Hindu family but never hesitated to expose how poor, downtrodden, lower caste people were suppressed and treated badly in the society. He has depicted the stark reality of the untouchables in the society during Indian pre-independence. His novel *Untouchable* depicts the suffering of lower castes in India before independence. Mulk Raj Anand has presented the plight of untouchables by focusing the suffering condition of Bakha who is presented as a sweeper who cleans the toilets of upper-class people. The upper and lower caste characters in the novel make us think about the unjust treatment given to the lower castes. Mulk Raj Anand has presented the depressed condition of lower castes who are treated differently by the upper caste people. This paper is an attempt to show how untouchables who are lower caste people suffered in their life because of unjust practices in the society. Hinduism in India is very often criticised as it is based on Manusmriti. Many critics have criticised Manusmriti as it is based on the activities as Brahman, Kshatriya,Vaishya and Shudra. It has given birth to caste system in India.

Bakha is presented as the hero of the novel *Untouchable*. He highlights the caste system which pre-independent India witnessed. In post-Independence period many Dalit movements against caste oppression took place during the colonial period under leaders such as Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, M.C.Rajah and Ramaswami Naicker. Mulk Raj Anand has presented the caste system in the society in his novel *Untouchable*. Even the names of lower castes have thoughtfully given by the writer to show the social condition of the lower and upper classes in the society. The names of the lower castes in the novel are: Bakha, Lakha, Sohini etc. whereas Havildar Charat Singh, Pundit Kali Nath are presented as upper caste people. Mulk Raj Anand has presented how Bakha suffers in his life because he belongs to lower caste. He has to clean latrines of the upper-class people like Havildar Charatsingh. Bakha is treated in a bad way by the upper caste people. He is not allowed to enter in the temple. Bakha touches a Hindu by chance in the market and that man abuses Bakha:

Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! off spring of a pig! Keep to the side of the road, the low caste vermin! why don't you call you swine and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a low-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and a shirt I put on this morning!

Sohini is molested by the temple priest who tries to rape Sohini and then blames her to protect his identity in the society. But Sohini returns home and tells Bakha not to fight with the temple priest because lower caste people can't blame upper caste. The actions of the upper caste people are against humanity. The upper-class people can do anything, they can illtreat lower castes. The temple pundit Kali Nath misbehaves with Sohini and after that blames her. It shows the horrible condition of the lower castes who are not allowed to touch

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upper class people. They are not allowed to enter in the temples. Even their entry is forbidden. They are not allowed to pull water from the well.

This suffering condition of the lower caste is presented by Mulk Raj Anand realistically. The lower caste characters like Lakha and Bakha are presented as sweepers. They have to clean latrines. Bakha cleans three rows of latrines single handed. They live life of beggars. They suffer in their life being lower castes. No one respects them. They are treated in a bad way in the society.

Bakha lives in the outcasts' colony under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment but outside their boundaries and separate from them. The colony in which Bakha lives is dark and deep. It shows that there is no good place for the low caste to stay. The writer has depicted the true picture of the society by highlighting the dwelling places of the lower casts, their way of living, thinking, behaving and acting.

Mulk Rak Anand has used some words and phrases and Indianized English words to show the caste struggle in the society. The following words show status in the society and are used for upper class people: Sahib, Pundit, Sarkar, Babu etc. The abuses and words used for the untouchables or outcasts are: bhangi, chandal, sudras, kala admi etc. It shows that upper castes are praised and respected in the society. The lower castes are molested in the society. An illiterate housewife showers curses and abuses Bakha who happens to sit on the wooden platform of her house to rest. Even food is served for brahmins in a respective way, but Bakha has to work hard to get the food. It shows discrimination in the society on the basis of caste. Bakha becomes a victim of the prevailing caste-system during pre-independent India. Bakha is slapped for the only reason that he belongs to a low caste.

Mulk Raj Anand has presented the psychological mindset of lower castes. They think of upper caste superior. They blame themselves and accepts that they belong to lower castes. When Bakha was seriously ill in his childhood days, Lakha Bakha's father took him to hakim and said; *"I shall be your slave all my life. The meaning of my life is my child. Hakimji, take pity. God will be kind to you."*

Bakha is the child of the twentieth century and the impact of new influences causes strings within him. Bakha tells his father Lakha : "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt". Bakha imitates white people or upper-class people. Even he goes to listen Mahatma Gandhi considering that there will be changes in the society. Mahatma Gandhi says: "I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism". It shows that Mulk Raj Anand tries to tell us that in future the condition will change and lower caste people will be treated equally like the upper-class people.

Mulk Raj Anand has realistically depicted the plight of the untouchables or lower castes. It reminds us the attempts of Dalit movements in India in general and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's efforts in particular to bring equality in the society. Mulk Raj Anand also has referred to Mahatma Gandhi and his attempts to give equal rights to harijans or lower castes. Thus, this novel tries to highlight the problems of the untouchables or lower castes.

The novel ends with a hopeful note that the problems of the untouchables will end. Bakha finds three solutions at the end of the novel to get rid of untouchability. First solution is to

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become a Christian because in Christian religion there is no difference between Brahmin and Bhangi. The second solution is the Gandhian way creating social consciousness among the people so that they will treat everyone equally and society will be free from caste and class conflict. The third solution will be the technical advancement. It will create new machines and toilet cleaning will be done with the help of flush systems and machines in future.

Mulk Raj Anand has succeeded in his attempt to shed light on the lives of lower caste people who are treated with great bias and unfairness. The writer has presented very effectively and realistically the oppression of classes and the issue of untouchability.

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