

UNTOUCHABLE: A TRUE PICTURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY BY MULK RAJ ANAND

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand is without a doubt a notable and towering figure in the field of Indian English writing, best known for his realistic representation of his characters, which stems from his firsthand experience of the locations and circumstances depicted in his works. Untouchable is a book that has gained huge notoriety and renown all over the globe because it portrays a real and crystal clear image of pre-independence Indian culture, in which the situation of the untouchable of the subalterns was very deplorable due to their marginalised position. Anand is renowned for writing novels about the poor and the lost, and in this work, he depicts the pains and sufferings of a low caste protagonist named Bakha, who is subjected to all forms of torture and humiliation by the so-called guardians of Indian society. The work conjures up in the imagination of the objective reader the horrible social malady that existed during colonial times and succeeding decades, and it tells a storey of socially orchestrated misfortune for the disadvantaged in Indian society.

KEYWORDS

Untouchability, Downtrodden, Marginalised, Discrimination, Caste System

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand, an Indian English writer with a nearly four-decade career, is a source of pride among Indian English authors. He has an unusual ability to represent the sad and wretched predicament of the lower classes in a realistic manner. His works are filled with sympathetic thoughts for the people and places he has firsthand experience of. He is a firm realist with a deep imaginative and sensitive understanding of Indian society in all of its facets. His books are accurate documentation of today's socioeconomic situation since they provide a true image of rural India. He is a lover of humanity, and his works express his obligation to society, particularly to those who are marginalised, oppressed, and subalterns who suffer at the hands of colonial rulers, as well as the so-called representatives of the traditional Hindu society's upper class. His accurate portrayal and genuine portrayal of the current orthodox Hindu community are very useful in bringing about good change in the society. Mulk Raj Anand was born on December 12, 1905, in Peshawar, Pakistan, and received his education at Lahore, London, and Cambridge, where he earned a Doctorate in Philosophy.

He has received several honours, including the Padma Bhushan, the International Peace Prize, and the Sahitya Academy Award. With the relocation of his father's army unit, he went from place to place, gaining fresh insights about Indian and European civilization, and gaining sympathy for the humble and destitute from his peasant mother. *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and The Sickle* (1942), and *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* (1943) are among his most popular works (1943) *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), and *The Death of a Hero* (1955) are some of his best-known works (1963).

His main works illustrate his fundamental concern for the oppressed, and the characters he chooses for his novels are reflections of those he encounters in his daily life. He was a gifted artist who depicted the lives of underprivileged Indians in a moving and realistic way, with a hint of political devotion and moral conviction. He was a writer of the ordinary people, the destitute, orphans, untouchables, and terrible labourers who lived in villages and were sons of the earth.

"Anand has genuine compassion for the low caste people of India, and his works put light on the current pains and sufferings of the poor," writes prominent Indian critic Pramod Kumar Singh. His works provide a realistic portrait of traditional Hindu culture, with a particular emphasis on the plight of the poor.

When Anand began writing in the 1930s, India was in the midst of a transition, with change looming in every facet of life. On one hand, the fight for political freedom was gaining traction, while on the other, the fight against poverty, illiteracy, casteism, superstition, and untouchability was being condemned by the writers of the time, who believed that political freedom was incomplete and meaningless without economic and social independence.

He is the author of the downtrodden, the misunderstood, and the underdog. Not that he was the first to write about the plight of the impoverished and oppressed in his writings. In their books, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra, and Munshi Premchand all did it. He highlighted the exploitation of the exploited class via his books. He is unquestionably the revolutionary and representative voice of society's bottom strata, i.e. the poor, impoverished, and have-nots.

In Tagore's *Chandalika*, the anguish of the untouchables is beautifully depicted. *Untouchable*, Anand's most renowned work, has a wonderful descriptive quality and has been able to capture the readers' attention to their tragic situation. He has conveyed the wants, hopes, sorrows, and sufferings of this socioeconomic class in a realistic manner. *Untouchable* is a heartfelt lament for the plight of the working class under British rule, as well as the pressures of outmoded Hindu/Brahmin practises and repressive traditions.

Slavery has been a burden on Indian society for the last two centuries. Discrimination based on caste and class, which had been practised for centuries, continued to undermine man's free spirit while also separating man from man. The society suffered on several levels, but it could not imagine coming together under one flag of humanity, devoid of prejudice. Under several flags, they remained fragmented. To a sensitive heart like his, prejudice was gnawing at the country's roots and eroding its vitality.

Anand could see and comprehend how societal prejudice was eroding the nation's strength. Thus, *Untouchable* is the author's pitiful and heartfelt scream against the upper castes' harshness and prejudice against the lower castes, the dalits, and the subalterns. It is his merciless assault on India's once strict, but now collapsing caste structure.

The focus of this work is on social protest in order to identify the key problems in Indian society. The emphasis is on the untouchable group, referred to as Harijan in Gandhian language and Dalits today. In the old Hindu Varna System, there are four primary caste

divisions: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas, and Shudras. Though caste classification was initially based on social division of labour, with the passage of time, a flaw developed in the system, and a person's caste was determined by the family genealogy in which he or she was born.

The Shudras were dubbed the low caste by the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishayas as a result of this. Some castes and the job they performed were deemed low, and the Shudras were dubbed the low caste by the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishayas. They were at the bottom of the hierarchy and had to follow a separate code of behaviour, as well as a particular style of walking, talking, and appearing in public. According to J. H. Hutton, Hinduism was the backbone of the purity-pollution complex in the Indian Caste system, and it was the religion that impacted the Indian people's everyday lives and beliefs.

Hutton is implying that under the age-old Indian caste system, Hinduism has absolute power to settle the issue of pure/impure since Hinduism is the religion that shapes people's views and even assigns each man a work from birth. The Shudras, or fourth Varna, or untouchables, are forbidden from learning Vedic literature and other texts, according to the Manu Smriti, the authoritative legal book of Hindu social and domestic code and behaviour. They have no privilege to visit temples, nor do they have the freedom to listen to Mantras or Vedic incantations. They are also denied the opportunity to learn Sanskrit, which was the language of most holy texts. This resulted in the decline and demise of this once-great language, which is now practically extinct. It is vital to note that sweepers and scavengers are considered untouchables due to the dirty task they must do.

People of the so-called higher caste felt that being touched by a sweeper or a scavenger would dirty them. Religion is very important in our society, with Hinduism emerging as the most powerful influence. The presence of an untouchable was seen by the Brahmins as a terrible omen. The most absurd aspect of the whole situation was that it was these so-called untouchables who laboured in the fields to provide food and other necessities of life to the Brahmins, yet these upper caste moral guardians strove to exploit and destroy these downtrodden in the strong social system. Because he strongly thought that the people of genuine India do not live in mansions and palaces, but in rural and destitute huts, Anand picked his hero from the lowest strata of society and showed true India in Untouchable. Untouchables, carpenters, poor farmers, homeless mothers, and underprivileged youngsters provide a genuine image of India. With each subsequent work, he made these victims of society more strong, and through each character, he attempted to convey the sorrows of their gender, caste, and class in which they suffered. Walter Allen has this to say about Untouchable:

The author can only succeed in eliciting empathic understanding rather than aesthetic function in our readers via the character of Bakha. As he brings to the forefront the difficulty, tribulation, humiliation, and suffering encountered and felt by the subalterns in Indian society, the work exposes the unsympathetic and heartless attitude of the brutal caste system of Hindus. In a nation that says that all people living on this world are like family, there is significant inequality and social anarchy, and in actuality, one segment of the family is not

permitted to enjoy equality with the rest. The conventional and rotten social order is the result of accurate depiction of facts, vivid and gory details, and veracity. Anand was intrigued with the tragedy that this exceptionally gifted youngster was constantly humiliated by most people because of his low social status. He was unable to enrol in a school since his touch would defile his peers.

The book emphasises the societal injustices and injustices meted out to society's poor and disadvantaged. Bakha's lovely sister Sohini represents a docile and meek woman who used to go fetch water from the village well in the pitcher, where she had to wait a long time for the arrival of a high caste Hindu who could assist her in drawing water because she was forbidden from polluting the water with her touch. The untouchables' plight is particularly terrible since they must rely on the kindness of high-caste Hindus to get water from a public well.

Because the low caste people were too impoverished to have their own wells, they were forced to dwell in filth, dust, and thirst as a result of their inferiority. According to Anand, the outcastes were not permitted to ascend the platform around the well because the Hindus of the three higher castes would consider the water contaminated if they did. They were also not permitted to utilise the neighbouring brook since their usage might taint it. The well storey in this work is crucial to comprehending the Dalit or subaltern community's societal difficulties.

Anand criticises the Hindu caste system and the upper class's nefarious schemes to believe that only they are entitled to fundamental human rights. Sohini is said to possess the attributes of patience, humility, docility, and devotion to the whims and wants of lecherous upper-caste persons such as Pandit Kali Nath. Pandit Kali Nath kept an evil eye on this girl when filling the pitcher from the village well, and he asks her to clean his home, where he attempts to molest her, and when she refuses, Pandit begins to shout, "Polluted, Polluted!" When two people are begging for food at the entrance of a home, one is a Sadhu or a holy man who is treated with great devotion since his blessings would benefit them, and the other is an untouchable Bakha who is regarded with scorn.

Finally, there is no question that Mulk Raj Anand has provided an accurate and realistic image of ancient Brahminical Indian culture in his work *Untouchable*, in which the low caste people's situation was exceedingly dismal and horrible. As a result, via Bakha's persona, Anand hopes to instil a sense of awareness in the minds of outcasts and exploited individuals. The work conjures up in the imagination of the objective reader the horrible social malady that existed during colonial times and succeeding decades, and it tells a storey of socially orchestrated misfortune for the disadvantaged in Indian society. The author has succeeded in portraying the graphic and realistic description of Indian society with a remarkable capacity of realism, and he has been highly successful in conveying the image of pre-Independence India.

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