

Mulkraj Anand's *Untouchable*: Social Realism

J. Jayalakshmi¹ and Dr. K. Anand²

¹Research Scholar PG & Research Department of English Arignar Anna College (Arts & Science) Krishnagiri, Tamilnadu, India

²Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor PG & Research Department of English, Arignar Anna College (Arts & Science) Krishnagiri, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract: The novels written by Mulkraj Anand almost invariably center on some aspect of social consciousness. The story focuses on a number of issues, the most prominent of which are destitution, joblessness, illness, selfishness, and brutality. Since he is fostering an expansion of trade and political upheaval, there will inevitably be a need for new class structures in society. The representation of the tragic social state that existed in contemporary society is given a very emotional treatment in the novel *Untouchable*. Untouchability, the most pervasive form of social oppression in India, was the ideal topic for him to write about. The untouchability of certain things is a highly realistic topic that would be appropriate for a naturalistic literary work. The novel "Untouchable" is an excellent vehicle for conveying the realities of Indian society as they exist even today. Literature is the only medium that can create the awareness of untouchability. As a result of the elite person coming to see the mistakes, they have made in the past toward others who are oppressed, they are prepared to accept those people as equals in all regards. After then, humanism is the only ideology that can spread throughout society.

Keywords: Untouchable, Social realism, East-West Conflict, & Tradition-Modernity.

INTRODUCTION

Indian author, reformer, art critic, editor, journalist, short story writer, and political activist Mulk Raj Anand is widely admired for his many contributions to literature and society. His writing is likewise acclaimed as exceptional. His skill as a socially conscious novelist is exemplified by his vivid and sympathetic portrayal of India's underprivileged. Along with Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, he broke new ground as a fiction writer. He also wrote extensively in English. In the 1930s, as India was still battling for its independence, author Mulkraj Anand authored the novel *Untouchable*. He offered pieces that could portray human sufferings brought on by the political and social structure of the country, as he was aware of the caste system and human rights.

The term "untouchable" refers to the lowest members of India's working class and is associated with the Indian caste system, which is justified by a variety of ideologies, including religious ones. The goal is to demonstrate that even a person from the lowest socioeconomic class is a person with dignity and worth who is alienated from society due to his caste.

The story follows Bakha, a young kid who works as a sweeper, through a day and the effects that day has on him. Bakha is part of the lowest echelon of the low caste. This story makes it abundantly evident that the political regime is corrupt and subject to colonial power, and that the social structure is divided into various classes. Through careful observation, as if he had spent a day with the untouchable sweeper boy—Bakha his

hero—to make it very real and factual, he brought Bakha to life in *Untouchable*. He also created a spiritual crisis around Bakha that was large enough to encompass the entire country of India in the span of a single day's events, and he managed to capture Bakha's conceit in his work of cleaning latrines. In this way, Bakha is a reflection of the untouchables and a symbol for the sweepers who are doomed to much worse fates than the slaves. The novel is an excellent example of social realism since it depicts its setting, characters, and plot honestly.

The novel's opening depiction of the outcastes' colony is bleak and realistic, lending credibility to the novel's central subject of untouchability. The outcaste colony is depicted as not just poor, but also inhuman at the novel's opening. The bank of the river was home to a diverse community, including skimmers, leatherworkers, washermen, barbers, water carriers, grass cutters, and those who made a living off of the hides of dead animals left to dry. The castes responsible for maintaining the upper classes' personal cleanliness are relegated to squalor.

Within the framework of Hindu religious belief, untouchability has been explained as the inevitable conclusion of karma and reincarnation. Sins committed in previous lifetimes make a person untouchable at birth, according to Hindu religion. Contact with them was considered to be a source of pollution because of the negative connotations they were given in Hindu teachings. Hindus are forbidden by their faith to interact with street

cleaners or anything they may have touched. In *Untouchable*, the candy maker tosses Bakha the "Jalebis," while his assistant sprinkles water on the nickel coins he has placed on the shoe-board. And moreover, "the shortest cut to purification after unholy touch, was to negate it by touching a Mussulmen passing by," which is what a Hindu would do if he or she accidentally touched an untouchable. There is a lot of discrimination based on a person's race or religion. As an example, priests are exempt from the rules and the sweeper must announce his arrival by shouting, "posh keep a way, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!"

The terrible horror that is untouchability. This is a negative byproduct of the caste system, which was established in Hindu civilization on the basis of occupational differences. Bakha's pals include Ram Charan, the son of a washer, and chota, the son of a leather worker. Among them, Ram Charan was acknowledged to be of a superior caste. As a sweeper, Bakha belonged to the lowest social class. Sweepers are even lower than slaves in terms of social status. As much as Bakha wanted to learn, education was reserved for the Sahib's. For environmental reasons, they were not yet prepared to educate the lower classes. Even though Bakha had accepted this customary task, he could not reconcile the idea that they are no better than the manure they remove from the environment. Feeling inferior, Bakha was helpless to stop Pandit Kalinath from molesting his sister Sohini at the temple. He told his father, "They think we are just dirt since we clear their dirt," when he failed to obtain any food by begging from strangers. The concept of "untouchability" is degrading to human beings. A lack of parity between the sexes. Because of the male-dominated culture, she was silenced and repressed. Women of all social classes were subject to a wide range of restrictions. Bad treatment was given to the women of the lower classes. They weren't given the same respect as humans. The tragedy of untouchables is shown through the pollution event, the well incident, Sohini's molestation, and the Hindu woman's bread-throwing on the road. Their poverty heightens the tragedy of the untouchables. If you want to be untouchable, you have to be willing to be a servant forever.

Bakha, the novel's protagonist, resolves the tension between East and West, or tradition and modernization. One is trying to emerge, while the other is trying to fade away, and he is stuck between them. He feels trapped between

modernity and tradition and is unable to choose between the two. Unfortunately, he has been crippled by the centuries-old oppression and injustice from which he has suffered, and he is unable to alter the status quo even if he wanted to. Crowds gather around him after he unintentionally pollutes a random man in the street. While a fire of defiance burns in his chest, he must remain silent and take the abuse. Not only does he have to put up with his sister's mistreatment, but he also has to put up with the disrespect he receives in the market. He can't decide between anger and panic.

Bakha longs to break out from his established routine. His father and brother, on the other hand, accept their fate and never consider altering it, making him a foil to their fatalistic outlook. They are actual representatives of the powers of history, orthodox, and conservative, whereas Bakha is a symbol of social change and the movement from the old to the new, for the purpose of improving the lot of the underdogs in society.

Bakha is a thoroughly modern individual in every respect, from his worldview and lifestyle to his fantasies and desires. He prefers the lifestyle of a white Sahib to that of an untouchable. He wants to learn the tish-mish of the Sahibs, so he dresses and smokes like them (English). His goal is to abandon custom, norm, and conservatism altogether. However, he is an Indian to his very core. Pt. Kalinath's attempts to molest his sister set up his explosive rage. First and foremost, the introduction of the machine as a technological solution seems to him to be the most effective approach to solve the untouchability problem. As we can see, the novel not only depicts the 1930s and the social climate of the time, but it also explores the tension between the past and the present.

CONCLUSION

Untouchability, exploitation, poverty and wretchedness, the labor problem, hunger, religious and narrow fanaticism, the status of women, economic insecurity, etc. are all shown in this story. Using a fictional protagonist to advocate for human rights, this book aims to bridge the gap between the political and the fictional. This is said so that people may comprehend the truth that human beings may be saved if they come to appreciate and put into practice the inherent dignity and worth of every person

REFERENCES

Mulkraj, A. "Untouchable." *New Delhi: Arnold Publishers* (1981).

Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Jayalakshmi, J. and Anand, K. "Mulraj Anand's *Untouchable*: Social Realism." *Sarcouncil Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 1.5 (2022): pp 1-3.