



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**STUDY OF CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S
UNTOUCHABLE**

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*(Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dyal Singh College, Karnal (Haryana))*Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10217>**ABSTRACT**

This present paper focuses on the caste discrimination that is projected in the novel, *Untouchable*. Mulk Raj Anand narrated the lives of the impoverished and oppressed in traditional Indian society. The novel, *Untouchable* illuminates the atrocities that still exist in India. The narrative illustrates the tense and troubled interactions between upper-caste Hindus, Muslims, Christians and untouchables oppressed in colonial India. Bakha is a metaphor for the oppression and exploitation that have been untouchables like him. Bakha is an extremely skilled worker and passers-by frequently admired his prowess and briefly wondered whether he belonged to cleaning public restrooms. The main character, Bakha, is a life-size character who effectively conveys the agony of an oppressed, disadvantaged, and fated human being for no other reason than being an outcast. Mulk Raj Anand has painted a true and accurate picture of traditional Brahminical India, when the low caste population's plight was truly deplorable and pitiful.

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INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand holds a special place in the hearts of Indian English authors whose careers have spanned almost four decades. Mulk Raj Anand was born in Peshawar, now in Pakistan, on December 12, 1905. He received his education in Lahore, London and Cambridge and holds a doctorate in philosophy. He has won numerous major honors, including the Nobel Peace Prize, the Padma Bhushan and the Sahitya Academy Award. His best-selling books include *The Sword and The Sickle* (1942), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Village* (1939), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* (1943), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Death of a Hero* (1963), *Coolie* (1936) and *Untouchable* published in the year 1935. His best-known works demonstrate his fundamental concern for the oppressed and the characters he chooses for his books are reflections of the people in his immediate environment.

In 1935, Mulk Raj Anand released his debut novel, *Untouchable*, which focused on the dismal existence of underclass people who tried to change their situation by moving into the center from the periphery but failed when they had to confront reality of cast discrimination. The critical analysis of this novel must focus on how the subalterns are portrayed. Anand echoed the reality, mindset and position of subalterns. Subalternity occurs on the basis of caste, class and gender in the Indian cultural setting. The caste discrimination has greatly harmed the citizens of our nation. The situation remained the same under British authority. The caste system has been in our nation from the beginning of time. A

societal ill caused by the caste system is untouchability.

DISCUSSION

Untouchable is a remonstrance novel in which Mulk Raj Anand's technique of attacking the social malevolence of caste discrimination invited the concentration of the people. Pre-independence time sweeper Bakha, who is 18 years old, strikes up a relationship with untouchable. Additionally, it looks at the despair of outcasts or members of the working class as well as their resentment of the upper caste. The narrative illustrates the tense and troubled interactions between upper caste Hindus, Muslims, Christians and untouchable oppressed in colonial India. The work offers a fantastic starting point for the Indian-English author to explore the subaltern realm. The novel, *Untouchable* expresses optimism for both untouchable Hindus and India by incorporating Gandhi's ideology, which aims to increase consciousness in order to abolish the caste system and other forms of hierarchy in Indian culture.

Untouchable is a heartbreaking depiction of the sufferings endured by members of the lower classes under British rule as well as the weight of restrictive norms and obsolete Hindu/Brahmin traditions. For the previous 200 years, slavery had been a heavy burden on Indian civilization. The unfettered spirit of man has continued to be crushed by age-old discriminatory customs based on caste and class, which have also served to keep men apart from one another. The society experienced various forms of suffering but was unable to imagine coming together under the ideals of humanity without prejudice. Under several flags, they persisted in



disintegrating. This discrimination, to a sensitive heart like his, was gnawing at the foundation and eroding the strength of the nation. Anand could see and comprehend how the nation was being weakened by the widespread caste discrimination in society. As a result, *Untouchable* is the author's pitiful and heartbreaking scream against the violence and prejudice displayed by members of higher castes toward members of lower castes, dalits and other under classes. He is ruthlessly attacking India's historically rigid but eroding caste system.

The novel, *Untouchable* is heavily influenced by Gandhi. Other characters who are from a lesser caste than Bakha, the main character, also experience hardship. The colony of the untouchables is off limits to the rich. It demonstrates how unconcerned the wealthy are with the welfare of those who slavishly serve them. The outcasts are viewed by them as their movable but untouchable property. Simply because sweepers clear their dirt, they view them as dirty. They bring the untouchable into complete reliance on them. The sweepers are forced to rely on the Hindu castes' kindness even for water, a basic essential for life.

Bakha is a metaphor for the oppression and exploitation that have been untouchables like him's lot in life. The novel is a day-by-day account of Bakha's existence as an untouchable from the scavenger caste, sometimes referred to as 'bhangis' in several Indian languages. This caste's job was to maintain the streets and restrooms clean for the upper castes. The untouchables were required to live in mud-walled, one-roomed kutcha homes, which made for exceedingly filthy circumstances. There was an improper drainage system in place and there was

a bad odor throughout. The invisible tears of Bakha, who patiently endures the most embarrassing and terrible days of his young life in this novella, cover nearly every page of the novel. He must cope with prejudice, bigotry and hypocrisy starting at dawn. Bakha's daily regular job starts with his father abusing him repeatedly:

"Get up, ohe, you Bakhya, Ohe son of pig! Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten". (*Untouchable*, 5)

The protagonist, Bakha is an extremely skilled worker and passersby frequently admired his prowess and briefly wondered whether he belonged cleaning public restrooms. Despite Bakha's talent and dedication, he had no chance of succeeding in life. He was born into a lowly class, thus he is bound for life to his onerous, degrading employment. The potentials of Bakha are stifled and choked off before they can even begin to grow. Despite his strong desire to attend school and further his education, he is unable to do so because the high caste parents will not let their sons come into contact with the low caste man's son. Bakha was enchanted by the glitz of the white man's lifestyle while working in a British regiment's barracks. He has his own set of dreams and is quite enthused. He must, however, actually beg for food and suffer humiliation at every bend of the route due to his meager resources and the situation. They had to wait for hours for the clemency of the upper caste and were not even allowed to draw water from a well. They will be fed by throwing, and if they accidentally contact somebody, they will be punished. However, the higher class does not view this as untouchable when they abuse their teenage girls. Before the day is out,



Bakha will endure further humiliation. He visits a nearby temple out of curiosity and becomes intrigued by its unsolved mystery. The priest shouted, 'Polluted!' interrupting Bakha as he was looking out the window. 'Polluted!' in the meantime, the throng gathered and yelled at him, saying:

"Get off the steps you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service!"
(*Untouchable*, 53)

The main character, Bakha, is a life-size character who effectively conveys the agony of an oppressed, disadvantaged, and fated human being for no other reason than being an outcaste. He resides in a filthy colony with his father Lakha, mother Sohini, younger brother Rakha, and sister Sohini. He is an eighteen-year-old boy who is powerful and young. Long ago, his mother passed away. His father is very elderly and unable to work because his frail limbs have lost the ability to function as a result of aging. Bakha has to fulfill the demands, much like the majority of Indian households. He puts in a lot of effort. His wages are so pitiful that they hardly cover even the most basic expenses. They are, however, powerless. Bakha and his family must also endure the intolerable disgrace and humiliation of being outcasts since they are the offspring of the lesser god. In the caste-based Hindu society, he is a mute spectator and a target of embarrassment.

Bakha's sister Sohini serves as a representation of a submissive and meek woman who used to take water from the village well in a pitcher. She had to wait for a high caste Hindu to arrive so he could assist in drawing water because it was against the law for her to touch the water. The untouchables' miserable situation is extremely

upsetting since they must rely on Hindus of higher castes to provide them with water from the public well. Due to their subordination, the low caste people were too impoverished to have their own wells. Thus, they were forced to dwell in filth, dust and hunger. Anand is narrating as:

"The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted." (*Untouchable*, 14-15)

In this novel, the focus is on social protest in order to identify the main problems with Indian society. The untouchable group, known as Dalits now and Harijan in Gandhian language, is the subject of the article. The old Hindu caste system is divided into four main groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas, and Shudras. Although the primary basis for caste distinction was the division of labor in society, a flaw in the system developed over time when a person's caste began to be determined by the family tree into which they were born. Anand, who firmly believed that people in genuine India did not reside in bungalows and palaces but rather in villages and humble huts, chose his hero from the lower strata of society in *Untouchable* and depicted the country as it actually is. Untouchables, carpenters, subsistence farmers, destitute ladies and poor children are all examples of the real India. With each subsequent novel he produced, he gave these social outcasts more authority while attempting to portray the suffering associated with their gender, caste and class through each individual character.

**CONCLUSION**

So, Mulk Raj Anand makes a forceful statement against caste division in Indian society through the novel *Untouchable*. He echoed the reality, mindset and situation of subalterns. Subalternity occurs on the basis of caste, class, and gender in the Indian cultural setting. The caste system has greatly harmed the citizens of our nation. Even if untouchability was outlawed by legislation in India, people's mental, social and traditional outlooks remained unchanged. India is not exempt from the class structure either. The novel considers how everyone should demonstrate their seriousness with regard to this pressing issue facing Indian society as a whole. Hindu society must be free of the caste system and birth inequities. Finally, it can be concluded that, Mulk Raj Anand has painted a true and accurate picture of traditional Brahminical India, when the low caste population's plight was truly deplorable and pitiful. Anand hopes to instill a sense of awareness in the consciences of outcasts and exploited people through Bakha's persona. The novel conjures up in the reader's imagination the horrible social ill that prevailed throughout colonial times and in later decades, and it tells a story of social manipulation done to the disadvantaged in Indian culture. The novelist has succeeded to a great extent in delivering a graphic and vivid description of Indian society by painting a picture of pre-Independence India with a rare power of realism.

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