Abstract

Untouchable is a pathetic but heart-rending cry of Anand against the cruelty and prejudices of the higher caste people towards the lower castes, the subalterns or Dalits. It is his ruthless attack against the rigid caste system in Indian society. Anand's daring effort of choosing the untouchable as a hero covers the terra incognita for introducing "into creative narrative....whole new people who have seldom entered the realms of literature of India." The Road portrays not only the suffering of the untouchables but also of the magnanimous caste Hindus who try to awaken the conscience of the members of their own community against the evils of untouchability. His main concern is to dismantle the old, conventional, orthodox social order and to make a society based on the principle of equality and brotherhood.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advocate of the downtrodden and the underprivileged and a direct successor of Premchand, Anand exhibits in his novels an acute concern for the subordinates in terms of caste. Before Untouchable (1935), Indian novels in English were based upon history or romance (for example novels of Bakim Chandra or Tagore), or on the middle and upper middle class life (as the novels of Sharat Chandra) but lacked the realistic and naturalistic fervour of Balzac or Zola. It was Anand's aim to focus attention on the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor and underdogs-the subalterns of society. From his peasant mother, Anand doubtlessly derived his common sense, his sense of the ache at the heart of
Indian humanity and his understanding compassion for the subaltern or ‘Daridra-Narayana’ as Iyenger terms it. (332)

2. AIM
To point out the cruel and unhealthy social practices that single out large section of the Indian populace for harassment of various kinds on the basis of castes into which they are born by a biological accident.

3. ABOUT UNTOUCHABLE

Untouchable is a pathetic but heart-rending cry of Anand against the cruelty and prejudices of the higher caste people towards the lower castes, the subalterns or Dalits. It is his ruthless attack against the rigid caste system in Indian society. Anand’s daring effort of choosing the untouchable as a hero covers the terra incognita for introducing “into creative narrative....whole new people who have seldom entered the realms of literature of India." (Apology, 79)

The inhuman treatment meted out to Bakha in Untouchable could have really happened to a social out caste during the colonial days in India, perhaps such cruelties are being perpetuated in many parts of villages even today which the objective media reports. Undoubtedly, Anand had drawn upon what he had himself witnessed and heard as a boy, he brings into print in the form of a novel. The novel evokes in the mind of a reader the horrifying social malady that existed in the colonial days and in the subsequent decades makes a tale of socially created woe to the downtrodden in the Indian society. Perverted orthodoxy in the name of religion and the deadness of human feeling become the twin evils which systematically destroy any effort made by the government and the social organizations to eradicate the untouchability in the society.

Concern for the untouchables is also the main occupation of Anand in his novel The Road. Like Untouchable this novel of Anand deals with the same problem but with a difference, as it is a novel of today where casteism is abolished and untouchability is legally forbidden. The novel, however, shows that the untouchables or ‘Dalits’ are still subordinated and live as subalterns.

It is note-worthy that untouchability was finally abolished in our society only in 1950 by the Indian constitution which recognized the right to equality as a fundamental right. Not that the constitution and independence have made a great difference to the Dalit social life in the post-colonial period since the age-old prejudices, deeply ingrained in the upper caste consciousness, contemned to prevail. Independence marked only the attainment of social freedom. Political dictators may have gone but social dictatorship persists especially in rural India, and the Dalit subalterns are the worst victims of this social dictatorship, otherwise known as the cruel and unhealthy social practices that single out large section of the Indian populace for harassment of various kinds on the basis of castes into which they are born by a biological accident.
4. ABOUT THE ROAD

The Road (1961) is based on an actual incident. When Saros Cowasjee asked Mulk Raj Anand why he wrote this novel, since he had covered much the same ground in Untouchable, he replied:

Well it was kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, 20 miles from Delhi in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru, to find that the outcastes not only in the South India, but in the mixed North were still confined to the limbo of oblivion. There was something tragic comic to me in the fact that the caste Hindus would not touch the stones quarried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had been touched by the untouchables. I mentioned this to the great Nehru. He did not believe me. He was quite angry at my mentioning this awkward fact. I said I would prove it to him by showing it to him in the 'enchanted mirror.' (Letters, 124)

The "enchanted mirror" Anand created in The Road. The story of Govardhan village can be the story of any village of India. The people in the village produce plenty of cattle milk and large amount of vegetables. But selling them to their city, Gurgaon, is a big problem as there is no transportation facility. The government, aware of this serious problem faced by the villagers, decides to fulfill their aspiration by building a road connecting the city to the village. The villagers are very happy that soon vehicles would be able to visit their village and the era of economic prosperity is to begin. The work is started. Bikhu (the hero of the novel) and other untouchables also get chance to work in the road construction. The landlord Thakur Singh, who has become rich by exploiting the untouchables, cannot tolerate the idea of Bikhu and other untouchables drawing wages just like the caste-Hindus for taking part in the road construction. The caste feeling soars up. The caste Hindus refuse even to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables. But the village headman Dhooli Singh, inspired by the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi decides to treat the untouchable as children of God (Harijans). He courageously joins hand with the untouchables in the construction of the road.

Thakur Singh becomes furious. At his instigation, the village priest Suraj Mani excommunicates Dhooli Singh. Soon Sanju son of Thakur Singh, a merciless villain, translates into action his father's fury with the poor subalterns i.e. untouchables, by burning their huts. Dhooli Singh's son Lachman, who is in love with the landlord's daughter Rukmani also joins hand in the arson organized by Sanju against untouchables, in the hope that it would please Thakur Singh and one day he would be able to marry Rukmani. On the other hand, the contretemps lacerates the magnanimous heart of Dhooli Singh with sorrow and he decides to help the untouchables to build their huts. He generously permits them to occupy his own house till their huts are built.

Dhooli Singh's wife is a traditional orthodox woman. She becomes angry at the behaviour of her husband. She cannot tolerate the free mixing of her family with the untouchables and getting "polluted". And she leaves him. Dhooli Singh stands all these ordeals with fortitude.
When the government authorities come to know that the road, instead of uniting people, divides families, threatens friendships, spoils marriage contacts and is responsible for the burning of huts of untouchables, they send an official to instruct the villages that untouchability is a social evil and has been legally abolished and anyone perpetuating it can be punished under the law.

Soon reason prevails over emotion in Lachman and he joins the untouchables in the road construction. Sanju also behaves with repentance for some time, but soon the feudal blood he has acquired wings him to pursue his crusade against the untouchables. Hence, the understanding that Lachman would marry Rukmani and Sanju would marry Dhooli Singh’s daughter Mala ends.

Meanwhile the construction of the road continues. Finally, when the road is ready, Bhiku did not go towards home. Instinctively he went in the direction of the road he had helped to build. And in his soul he took the direction, out of the village, towards Gurgaon, “while was the way to Delhi town, capital of Hindustan, where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste.”

5. THE SOCIAL MILIEU OF UNTOUCHABLE.

The era of The Road is not very different from the social milieu of Untouchable. The law of the land has not influenced the attitude of the society. As in Untouchable so in this novel, we find the caste Hindus ill treating their outcaste brethren: They are not allowed to come into physical contact with the 'twice-born', or permitted to enter the temple for coming into contact with the God of all. Just like in Untouchable, in The Road Anand introduces a lecherous and hypocritical priest. Pandit Suraj Mani in this novel reminds us Pandit Kali Nath. He, Pandit Suraj Mani, moves about carrying with him a little earth to avoid pollution by treading on what has been 'soiled' by the untouchables. At the same time, he gladly accepts the mangoes plucked by the untouchables saying, "Sweet is the fruit of nambardar Dhooli Singh's grove."

Priests like Suraj Mani and Kali Nath are the black-marketers of religion for their own selfish ends. In their shallowness, the mix up religion, politics and social life and vehemently preach on pollution by touch, pollution from distance or on Karma theory which says that the suffering of the untouchables is only a punishment divinely ordained for their bad deeds in their previous births and that they should submit themselves to every blow and kick the upper castes give them at every step of their lives with humility for the sake of caste promotion in their next birth.

6. ANAND’S SOCIAL CRITIC.

Anand is a social critic. He often uses the tool of irony to expose social evils. Untouchability is particularly vulnerable to ironic treatment as its practitioners are satanic in their hypocrisy and pharisaical in their piety. Cowasjee writes, “The Hindu religion is responsible for this fiendish segregation of humanity.”(51) This is not an accepted view. This reveals rather an insufficient understanding of what Hindu religion means or stands
for. Casteism is a social practice and no Hindu religious leader of any merit and significance would admit it as a part of his religion. Casteism is placed in Hindu religion by certain wolves in sheep’s skin for certain privileges and advantages. Gandhi says that if the Hindus oppress the untouchables they should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion, but in those who profess it. (*Untouchable*, 165)

Anand's anger with such guardians of religions seems to echo the fiery words spoken by Swami Vivekanand:

>Priest craft is the bane of India.....Do you think our religion is worth the name? Ours is 'Don't touch-ism', only 'Touch me not.' Good heavens! A country, the big leaders of which have for the last two thousand years been only discussing whether to take food with the right hand or the left, whether to take water from the right hand side or the left.....if such a country does not go to run what other will? A country where millions of people, live on the flowers of the 'Mohua' plant, a million or two of Sadhus and a hundred million or so of Brahmanas suck the blood of these poor people, without even the least efforts for their amelioration-is that a country or hell? Is that a religion or the devil's dance? (*40*)

*The Road* portrays not only the suffering of the untouchables but also of the magnanimous caste Hindus who try to awaken the conscience of the members of their own community against the evils of untouchability. Why is the world of Anand's untouchables, expressed in the sheer terms of absolute poverty? Perhaps it is actually so in the practical life. But will the untouchability be removed from the lives of untouchables after only attaining the goal of economic equality? One, who thinks so, seeks the root of the untouchability in the present-day poverty ridden life of an untouchable. But is it so easy to solve this riddle? One, who thinks so, confuses untouchability with poverty.

### 7. UNTOUCHABILITY AND POVERTY

Though untouchability and poverty seem to be going hand in hand in our country, it does not mean that untouchability and poverty are inseparable from each other. Though it seems to be like that they are two sides of the same coin inseparable from each other. Poverty is a part and parcel of untouchability and every untouchable is poor, but every poor person ought not to be an untouchable. An untouchable is poor because he is born as an untouchable, but it is not true that he is called an untouchable because he is born as a poor. In this way the root of poverty, in the case of an untouchable, lies in untouchability, but the root of untouchability does not lie in poverty. Every poor man in our society is not an untouchable, though every untouchable is poor. In this way the root of poverty of an untouchable lies in his religion and not in the present state of life.

### 8. CONCLUSION

The collage of Dalit-life presented in the novelist gives an impression of inhuman behaviour by the upper caste on the Dalits. Nobody opposes the view that the untouchable subalterns are no better than bonded labourers. Rohinton Mistry also wants to affirm that it
is impossible to remove casteism from Indian mind. There is an “invisible line of caste” which the poor subalterns can never cross. The poverty-stricken Dalit women become vulnerable to sexual abuses. Most of the violence against the Dalits as Mistry has pointed out in A Fine Balance comes from landowning caste-Hindus equipped with militias and private armies.

Through the characters like Bakha, Bhiku, etc Anand attempts to project the humiliation and agony faced by subalterns in the Indian society which is divided into the graded inequality and hierarchical anarchy; where the tall claims of वेणुकृष्ण कृष्णकाम have proved to be merely a utopian dream. His main concern is to dismantle the old, conventional, orthodox social order and to make a society based on the principle of equality and brotherhood.

9. REFERENCES


TO CITE THIS PAPER

This is certified that the paper entitled
Social Liberalism of Mulk Raj Anand: Study of Untouchable and The Road
Authored by
Dr. Sanjeev Gandhi
Associate Professor,
Department of English, Government College, Chhachhrauli (Haryana)
has been accepted & published online in IJIFR continuous 66th edition
The mentioned paper is accepted after rigorous evaluation through double blind peer reviewed process.

Authorized Signature With Seal

Dated: 25/02/2019