

**CASTEISM – A SOCIAL EVIL IN *UNTOUCHABLE***

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Mulkraj Anand strongly believes that the downtrodden is not born but made. With his personal experience and also with his gift of imagination, he depicts the pathetic socio-economic conditions of the downtrodden in pre-independence India through his novel *Untouchable*. This humanist-cum- social reformer propagates the doctrine of humanism and Gandhianism and wants to herald a casteless and classless Indian social era. The present paper aims at – how the downtrodden suffer during the period of pre-independence Indian socially as well as economically in the light of the characters of Mulkraj Anand's "Untouchable". The prime focus is on Anand's reformative vision against casteism and raises *vox populi* against untouchability.

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INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand breathes a sympathy which brings a new tenderness into contemporary writing. The unforgettable incident – the premature death of his cousin, Koushalya, a beautiful nine year old girl – and a memorable movement – feeling in love at first sight with Irene, the charming daughter of a Welsh Professor of Science – are the stepping stones of subconscious transforming himself as a writer. In the crucible of imagination, humanistic values are molded in different way throughout his research work. He strongly believes that philosophy is only solution to understanding the economic problems posed by human needs.

DIFFERENT SHADES IN MULKRAJ ANAND

Mulk Raj Anand has different shades – as great scholar, a teacher of king dynasty, a novelist, a social reformer, a civil servant, a thought provoker, a journalist, a politician, a humanist, a strong writer, a literary story teller – make him produce many useful and outstanding works that expose sufferings of suppressed and oppressed, depressed and downtrodden. Consequently, he proves himself as a versatile genius, an optimist, a humanist, a profound thinker, a moving speaker, an able organizer, a capital storyteller, and a literary architect through his thought provoking and worth reading novels. In short, his novels are nothing but a medley of different shades. He depicts the lives of the poor and



the downtrodden in his novels. He is one of the three pillars of Indian writings in English, Raja Rao, and R.K.Narayan being the other two. These writers, through their writings, tried to bring respectability and identity to Indian English Literature. These writers made a sincere attempt to articulate the subdued feeling and suppressed socio-economic emotion of their countrymen.

As Sorokin points out in his "Reconstruction of Humanity", Mulkraj Anand confirms that man should acquire spiritual awareness for the welfare of humanity. Basing on the philosophy, Anand has, rightly, selected the path of fiction to disclose the inequalities among the mankind and sufferings. Being a prominent figure in the colonial and the post-colonial Indian writing in English, Mulk Raj Anand reveals a blend of idealism, socialism and a keen perception of the contemporary social issues through the novel "Untouchable" that culminates in a tragic clash of interest and destinies.

Bengali novelists like Sharath Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore made endeavors to bring in a note of realism in their works. The trend was continued by the trio. The novelists gathered courage to voice the sufferings of the people under British rule and also under the pressure of outdated customs and oppressive traditions. The society had been reeling under the yoke of slavery for the past hundreds of year. Age old practices of discrimination on the basis of caste and class continued to separate man from man. The society suffered at different levels and at all levels but could not think of uniting regardless of any bias, under one banner of humanity. Early in life, his intimate contact with the suffering underprivileged and the myriad levels of Indian masses with their differences of caste, creed, and colour seem to have implanted in his mind profound impressions about 'the still sad music of humanity.' His research in philosophy has immensely contributed to his humanism; and as he admits in his "Apology for Heroism", his research was, indeed, 'search for truth'.

COMMON CONDITIONS OF UNTOUCHABLES IN PRE-INDEPENDENT INDIA

In Pre-independence India the downtrodden – so called untouchables - suffered from economic hardship because they lived in mud-walled cottages huddled in a colony and the people who lived there were the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer men, the barbers, the grass-cutters, the sweepers and other outcastes. The conditions which the downtrodden is enforced are really shocking though one can only share their aches and agonies. Their plight is so dire that even for the fulfillment of the basic needs like water and food; they had to depend on the mercy of high-caste Hindus. This novel is a faithful record and a transcription of the pathetic plight of the downtrodden who were subjected to immitigable social indignities only because of their lowly birth.

Anand's fictional novel "Untouchable" makes us knowing the real life spectrum of socio-economic exploitation of the downtrodden in pre-independence India. The story of the novel set in the so-called outcastes' colony of unnamed town during the British rule and is based on the life of the most downtrodden, despised and oppressed section of Indian Society, the outcastes. This angry young man cannot tolerate exploitation of one man by another man, or of one class by another. He is a sworn enemy to all kinds of exploitation, be that economic, social or political. The monster of socio economic exploitation is hydra-headed and can assume numerous forms. The first and the strongest type of exploitation is economic. Economic order that existed in the pre-Independence India and whose remnants are found even now to some extent, allowed untold wealth and power to be concentrated into a few hands. These few powerful capitalists and zamindars could dictate very harsh and humiliating terms to the many poor. The rich and powerful had full liberty to exploit the many poor and to grind them mercilessly under the wheel of economic monopolies.



LACK OF SECURITY TO GIRLS OF UNTOUCHABLE FAMILIES

The girls of downtrodden did not have security in the period. They completely suppressed and exploited by the high-caste Hindus. This is the heart-touching incident that is realistically depicted by Anand. Moreover, it is a microcosm to social status of the downtrodden - Sohini, Bakha's sister, had to go to the community well to fetch water for her tired and thirsty brother. She had to wait near the well for a long time putting up with the lustful men. One of the Hindus, Pandit Kali Nath, drew water for her and called her to his house to clean the courtyard and tried to molest her. But when she shouted to protect herself, he cried out "polluted", "polluted". Bakha arrived at the scene only to remain a mute witness, though his first thought was to beat him up. He desperately went home and told his father: "They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt".

The downtrodden faced humiliation each and every step of their life. Bakha had a few annas (coins) and wanted to buy some sweet to eat. He asked the shopkeeper to give him *jalebis* for four annas. The shopkeeper cheated him and, though Bakha knew it, he could not complain. The confectioner threw the packet like a cricket ball, placed the coins on the shoe-board for his assistant to splash some water on them and Bakha walked away embarrassed. As he was eating the sweet with delight, he touched a man without his consciousness. The touched man abused him, gathered a crowd around him and said that he should have warned him of his approach as: "Posh, Posh, sweeper coming". Suddenly one child said that he had beaten children. Though Bakha tried to defend that it was a lie, nobody voiced support him. "To Bakha, every second seemed an endless age of woe and suffering. His whole demeanour was concentrated in humility, and in his heart there was a queer stirring". The touched man slapped him and disappeared. Bakha lost his humility for a while but self came to him later when he realized that he was an untouchable.

OPPRESSION AND EXPLOITATION

Oppression and exploitation of simple village downtrodden, presented in the novel, and highlights the kind of economic exploitation. In his well-known essay, "*The Story of My Experiments with a White Lie*", he explains the profound impact Gandhi made on him during his stay at the Sabarmati Ashram. He particularly mentions that Gandhi "exhorted devotion to the poor". After the spiritual experience of the Gandhi Ashram, he says, "I began to dream of writing only about the poorest of the poor human beings, who I had known specially was I inspired to brood on the castaways." "*Two Leaves and a Bud*" is the heart reading experience of Gangu, a worker in the Macpherson Tea Estate, in Assam. The European bosses pester and exploit the labourers. Gangu and his family suffer much: his wife, Sajani, becomes a prey to malaria; and he himself faced death at the point of Reggie's gun in his attempt to save his daughter, Leila, from the clutches of the lust-blind Reggie. Goronway Ree quotes "with great skill and without insistence, Dr. Anand shows the Indian coolies exploited, starving, cheated, dirty, and diseased, as the true heirs of one of the world's greatest civilization".

Premila Paul in her thematic study of the novel says that this novel portrays, "the yawning hiatus between the haves and the have-nots, the exploiter and the exploited and the rulers and the ruled." The capitalistic exploitation widens the gap between the rich and the poor. This novel is an example of how the capitalistic exploitation kills the life of the poor labourers

MULKRAJ ANAND – THE GREAT SUPPORTER OF THE POOR

Finally, Anand is considered to be a doyen of Anglo-Indian literature. With him India has received an unceasing champion of the cause of the poor. His writings arrest the critical attention of the learned people towards the inhuman miseries and unjustified conditions of the downtrodden and deprived of Indian society. His humanitarian approach and altruistic attitude have always impelled him to use his mind and art for the sake of social welfare. With his literary power and perspectives he has tried his best



to spring up the healthy human values and a radical social transformation in our human society in which the haves and have-nots both can enjoy happily the bliss of human life on the same footing s of fraternity, peace, love and justice. Margaret Berry observes: "Anand's attacks, on political as well as social and economic institutions are carried out mainly on behalf of India's poor, in the efforts to destroys forces inimical to their development, and to build a world of freedom and equality where human potential can flourish"

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