

Depiction of Social Problems in *Untouchable*

Mulk Raj Anand occupies a place of pride among the Indian English writers whose literary career extended to nearly four decades. He has a strange capacity for depicting realistically the sad and miserable plight of the low classes. His novels are full of sympathetic feelings about the people and places he knows from his first hand knowledge. He is a marked realist and has a profound imaginative and sensitive apprehension of the Indian society in all its ramifications. His novels are faithful documents on the contemporary social set up as it presents a real picture of the rural India. He is a lover of mankind and his novels reflect his responsibility towards society, especially those who are marginalized, oppressed, and the subalterns who suffer at the hands of the colonial masters, and the so called representatives of the upper class of the traditional Hindu society. His faithful account and realistic presentation of the prevailing orthodox Hindu society are quite valuable in bringing a positive change in the society.

His major novels reveal his basic concern for the downtrodden and the characters he opts for his novels are reflections of the people from the life around him. He was an exceptional creative artist who delineated the life of poor Indians in touching and realistic manner with a tinge of political commitment and moral dedication. The novel *Untouchable* shows these by depicting the sufferings of Bakha. People have no sympathy for Bakha. It is only Mohammadan tongawala who shows sympathy towards him and saves the situation. He wonders why the Sahibs and Muslims don't mind touching them. The cruel and orthodox nature of the Hindus depicts that these are the probable reasons for conversion of a large number of low caste Hindus to Christianity. Another incident of humiliation is when Bakha goes to temple to sweep courtyard. Driven by his curiosity to know more about the caged snake god, he mounts the temple steps leading to the holy place inside the temple. He hears a loud cry, 'polluted, polluted, polluted!' (page 67). The crowd takes up the call of the priest, thinking that the presence of the untouchable has defiled the holy place. Bakha discovers that the priest is only trying to camouflage his indecency to Bakha's sister, Sohini. Sohini tells him altogether a different story. The priest not only tries to molest Bakha's sister but also attracted the sympathy of the crowd by accusing her and her brother of having polluted him and the premises of temple. Bakha feels completely helpless and much troubled at heart. At a moment he feels a wild desire to retaliate when the

thought of the pandit Kalinath's action comes to him but realising his helplessness, he wishes that his sister were not beautiful.

The third humiliation of Bakha is heart rending. When he goes to the silversmith colony to collect food for the family a housewife becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of the house and scolds him, 'perish and die' as he has defiled her house. Bakha begs his apology and asks for some food that is thrown at him as if to a street dog. The way Bakha collects his chapatti thrown by a woman who belongs to upper caste Hindu society is heart-shaking. Bakha returns home with only two chapattis and is in dilemma whether to explain the situation to his father. His father accuses and calls him good for nothing scoundrel. He is hoping that his younger son Rakha might bring something good to eat from military barracks. He now takes a flashback of degrading incidents that spoilt his day. When his younger brother comes home with some food, they all start eating from the same basket. Suddenly Bakha stops eating when something sticky touches his hand and his mind feels uneasy that it might be mixed up with somebody saliva. He tells a lie to his father that he had been invited on the marriage ceremony of Ram Charan's sister whom he once desired to marry. But Gulabo, Ram Charan's mother thought it below their dignity as they belonged to washermen caste and considered themselves superior to Bakha even among the outcastes. The great catastrophe of touching occurs in the morning and poisons his whole day as the novel is based on one day's action. Trauma and humiliation seem to ceaseless and endless for Bakha who represent outcaste Hindus subjected to untold miseries. Bakha meets Havildar Charat Singh who is a broad minded person who not only offers him tea but also presents him the hockey stick. Bakha is filled with deep gratitude for Charat Singh for his kindness and leaves the barrack in a happy mood. On the way Bakha meets the military Babu's two sons who want to play hockey. In a match the younger son gets hurt as a stone from Bakha's friend, Ram Charan's hand hit him badly on the head. Bakha gathers him in his strong arms and rushes to his home. Bakha expects that his mother would appreciate him for this kind and humanitarian act but he is surprised to see the manner in which she reciprocates his good deed. Instead of thanking him, she accuses him of defiling her house by coming there. Bakha is dejected and dismayed. He hands over the child and retreats. Bakha's protest against caste exploitation cannot bring any revolution to eradicate this social problem. He is an individual. He does not have favour of his own community.