

Manifestation of Exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract. An Indian author, Mulk Raj Anand wrote his first novel *Untouchable* which reflects the pangs and suffering of dalits or downtrodden in Indian way of caste system. The author presents the issue of exploitation and suffering in human life which results in inhuman manifestation. Indians recognize caste system which has created exploitation to outcaste people or untouchables, ultimately resulting in suffering of millions. Exploitation refers to ill-treatment meted out to the people of low-caste. Bakha is forced to do menial jobs for the caste Hindus but he is not paid by money except bread leftover. The untouchables have no entrée to interact with other people except within themselves. It is done by keeping them out to touch and use all public facilities such as road, well, school, temple, and such. The caste Hindus consider the untouchables' touch will pollute anything belonging to them and, for them, the untouchables are bad virus or the cursed ones. In conclusion, Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable* vividly portrays exploitation and human suffering. This inhuman treatment or exploitation which is brought about by the caste system has created dehumanization making the untouchables or the outcastes feel intensity of exploitation, suffering and hopelessness.

Keywords : Exploitation; suffering; ill-treatment; dehumanization.

Untouchable relates to the story of a young man who comes from outcaste family in Indian society. He is a young man who, at the beginning, idolizes the sahib's life and class. However, he is a realistic individual, lovable, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, as he does his nasty job i.e. of sweeper. The story centres around the young man's one day in his life. He endures one of the most humiliating days of his young life. From sunrise, he is forced to deal with discrimination, hatred and hypocrisy. He is woken in early morning by his abusive father's shouts. Over the course of the day, he was slapped in public for polluting an upper caste Hindu through an accidental touch on the street. His sister was molested by a priest, and had food thrown at him by a woman after he cleaned her gutters. He got humiliation and was blamed for an injury of a little boy, and he was finally thrown out of his house by his father. At the end of his day, he followed a crowd of people to listen to Gandhi's speech on untouchability. Gandhi told the untouchables to stop accepting those maltreatments, he wanted them to refuse the high castes' leftovers. The road out of untouchability is to purify their lives, to improve their hygiene, and get rid of their vices. However, he was confused and has never completely found the answer as he tries to search what he is born for. The story ends with a hope that someday he will find the poet who had told about 'flush system'. He returns to his father and his wretched bed, thinking new of Gandhi's words and the poet's machine. The

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main characters are Bakha, Havildar Charat Singh, Mahatma Gandhi, Colonel Hutchinson, the poet, Iqbal Nath, Sohini, and Pundit Kali Nath. The minor characters are Lakha, Rakha, Gulabo, Ram Charan, Chota, the Babus' family. The story is set in the outcastes' colony of Indian society in an unnamed town during the British occupation. At that time, Mahatma Gandhi's movement against the discrimination and unfairness towards the outcastes and against the British Empire was arising.

Exploitation in Economic Life

Mulk Raj Anand portrays the economic exploitation which becomes the common cause of poverty and hunger in India by presenting Bakha's family in the novel. The exploiters who are represented by high caste Hindus exploit the peasants and become the cause of their poverty and hunger. The exploited people have no liberty to earn their living. They are at the mercy of the exploiters for their basic needs. Moreover, the outcastes work for the high castes but they do not get anything in return, "Why aren't the latrines clean, you rogue of a Bakhe! There is not one fit to go near! I have walked all around! Do you know you are responsible for my piles? I caught the contagion sitting on one of those unclean latrines?" 'All right, Halvidar ji, I will get one ready for you at once', (*Untouchable*, 7) Bakha said cautiously as he proceeded to pick up his brush and basket from the place where these tools decorated the front wall of the house. Bakha felt cramp in his back after he finished cleaning all the latrines. But what makes him is that he is not paid with money but with some leftover of bread. It means that the outcastes are exploited in the name of the caste. The outcastes that are represented by Bakha have to do dirty works continuously which become a must for them. He not only gets an unworthy payment for the jobs but frequently abuses from the caste-Hindus as well. They always remind Bakha of his responsibilities of the cleanliness of the latrines, but they are totally indifferent to Bakha's welfare who slavishly serves them: He worked away earnestly, quickly, without loss of effort. Brisk, yet steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as a rock when it came into play, seemed to shine forth like glass. He must have had immense pent-up resources lying deep, deep in his body, for as he rushed along with considerable skill and alacrity from one door-less latrine to another, cleaning, brushing, pouring phenol. However, though an untouchable or outcaste like Bakha always works hard, there is always dissatisfaction in the caste-Hindus' eyes. Moreover, any time he makes a mistake, there will be a great humiliation as the consequence. They, regardless to the dirty jobs he does, will show their superiority through kinds of abuse. Anand's description of the outcaste colony in the beginning of the novel reveals not only poverty but also the subhuman level of their existence. They, without any scientific and responsible reasons from the castes, are excluded and cut off from economic activities by deliberately separating them from the caste Hindu:

There lived the scavenger, the leatherworkers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water now soiled by dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it. The odour of hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes... (12)

Anand holds the mirror to the exploitative and inhuman practices of the Hindu social structure. Bakha lives in a cave-like, dingy, dark one-room mud house. He sleeps on a faded blue carpet under a worn-out greasy blanket. His father and his brother sleep on a broken string bed under a patched quilt. Bakha's sister, Sohini even cannot wear bodice under her Muslin shirt. Bakha's poverty is revealed through his inability in buying some sweets, "Dare I buy some sweets?. After thinking all kinds of the sweets, he decides to buy sweepers should not buy sweets, if at all they buy, it should only be coarse stuff like jalebis". (36) The untouchables' hard working, dexterity, skill and intelligence are worthless for the castes. They will not be paid properly even just by bread because the upper castes people consider them having particular bad smell and the cursed. They are not deserved to be paid by money for they just do menial jobs such as cleaning the latrines and the drains, and sweeping the lanes, the streets and such. The worst is that they have no rights to claim their own rights. The Hindus or the castes make use of them by forcing them to work hard for them but deny their payments. Although the untouchables or the dalits are intelligent and hard workers, they will not be employed in proper occupations, besides, there is no occupation for them, ... "What a dexterous workman' ...A bit superior to his job,' they always said, 'not the kind of man who ought to be doing this...' For he looked intelligent, even sensitive, with sort of dignity..."(49) It was perhaps his absorption in his task that gave him the look of distinction or his exotic dress, however loose and ill-fitting, that removed him above his odorous world. The fact is that the Hindus exploit the untouchables. They should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion, but in those who profess it. However, the Hindus have exploited, abused and oppressed them in the name of the caste.

Exploitation in Social Life

The author portrays how the outcastes or the dalits feel exploited in social relationship by the prohibition of using public facilities, such as road, well, temple, and school. To begin with, Anand represents the exploitation in social relationship through Bakha's family. The suffering of Bakha and his family owing to exploitation is clearly shown through their place of living. Their house are situated separately in uncongenial place to avoid contact with the people of the upper castes. The outcastes or untouchables are regarded as the cursed and polluted people so their

touch with the upper castes, even if it is accidentally, means the curse for the upper castes and the terrible threat for the outcastes. The exploitations towards the untouchables or the outcastes can also be seen through how they are fully made leading their life in a total dependence on the upper castes (castes-Hindus). Even to get water, the basic need of human beings to survive, they must depend on the mercy of the upper castes. It is narrated :

The outcastes were allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor they were allowed access to the near-by brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream...the outcastes have to wait for change to bring some caste Hindu to the well, for luck to decide that he was kind, for Fate would ordain that he had time—to get their pitchers filled with water. (45)

We can see how the outcastes are considered as not fully-humans who have not the same rights as the castes have. They are even considered as a kind of bacteria which will pollute the well if they are near or use it. The caste Hindus is a kind of God so they have to beg just to get water, "Oh Maharaj! Maharaj! Won't you draw us some water, please? We beg you. We have been waiting here a long time, we will be grateful, shouted the chorus of voices as they pressed towards him, some standing up, bending and joining their palms in beggary, other twisting their lips in various attitude of servile appeal and abject humility as they remained stated..." (61) Either the sepoy was a callous brute or in too much of a hurry. But he passed by without heeding the request of the group collected at the foot of the well. The outcastes can only wait like animals waiting for their food brought by their master. They wait for a caste Hindu who will fill their pitchers. However, not all the caste Hindus are willing to fulfil their hope. This fact proves caste Hindu's superiority to them and also how they are excluded from social life. They, indeed, feel very exploited in their daily life.

Anand then gives the clearest examples of exploitation in social relationship by representing character Bakha with his experiences in the single day of his life. Bakha totally experiences a great degree of humiliation - being exploited and dehumanized verbally and in actions. He starts his menial jobs early in the morning by his abusive father's words to wake him up. He is forced to clean the latrines and sweep the roads. He has to put his dream of an education behind for he realizes his position as an untouchable :

There was no school which would admit him because the parents of the other children would allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of the low-caste man...the masters wouldn't teach

the outcastes, lest their finger which guided the student across the text should touch the leaves of the outcastes' books and they be polluted. (73)

The untouchables have no access to school because the school and the parents of caste pupils are afraid that the untouchable pupils will touch them. They are afraid that the untouchables will pollute the school and the school facilities. The outcastes as human beings lost their right to access normal social life. They are indirectly forced to live in their stupidity, poverty, and servitude. Bakha as the representative of the untouchables is considered to be unworthy to be touched. Moreover, they are treated worse than animals.

In his attempt to buy some cigarettes, Bakha has to face great humiliation, begged to know where he could put a coin to pay. He even cannot give the money directly to the shopkeeper's hands to pay. It has been observed :

The shopkeeper pointed to a spot on the board near him. Bakha put his anna there. The betel-leaf-seller dashed some water over it from the jug with which he sprinkle the betel leaves now and again. Having thus purified it he picked up the nickel piece and threw it into the counter. Then he flung a packet of 'Red-Lamp' cigarettes at Bakha, as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop (79).

Thus it is clear that the untouchables feel exploited in trying to communicate directly to the castes. Anand even describes this condition by using simile to sadistically compare Bakha as human being and dog. It is obvious that the upper caste cut any communication from the outcastes. The untouchables have to give warnings to the castes about their presences, so the castes can avoid any touch of polluting skin because they considered them as the cursed people. Bakha feels exploited and humiliated while he is walking on the street of the town. Incidentally a man of caste in a great hurry bumped Bakha. It means that the touch has defiled him. Instead of apologizing, the proud caste-Hindu totally humiliated him as if Bakha was not better than a dirty dog. It is quoted, 'Keep to the side of the road, you lowcaste!'... 'Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take to purify myself'(38). Just because of unintentional touch at the road, the caste-Hindu really abuses Bakha by all his inhumane words, 'Dirty dog!, Son of a bitch!, The offspring of a pig!'(38) The caste treated him as worthless object. What makes him feel the worst is that he is not allowed to walk on the public streets. Moreover, this humiliation is supported by the crowd as a form of class dehumanization on another class who are considered as lower, polluted and unworthy people to be touched. Anand vividly shows how this condition exploited Bakha, "This dirty dog bumped right into me! So unmindfully

do these sons of bitches walk in the streets! He was walking along without the slightest effort at announcing his approach, the swine!”...(39) The crowd which pressed round him, staring, pulling grimaces, jeering and leering, was without a shadow of pity for his remorse. It stood unmoved, without heeding his apologies, and taking a sort of sadistic delight in watching him under the abuses and curses of its spokesman. The outcastes’ apology is not enough for the caste Hindu if there is just an unintentional touch of them. They have to knee under their feet or shoes. The caste abuse them without any concerns of their feelings as human beings. When Bakha walks on public road, the touched man humiliated him as if he was an inhuman object and the crowd made him more oppressed. The caste man humiliated him as if he was an inhuman object and the crowd shouted at him and abused him. All these make him more oppressed and suffer:

To Bakha, every second seemed an endless age of woe and suffering. His whole demeanours were concentrated in humility, and in his heart there was a queer stirring. His leg trembled and shook under him. He was really sorry and tried hard to convey his repentance to his tormentors. But the barriers of space that the crowd had placed between themselves and him seemed to prevent his feeling from getting across. And he stood still while they ragged and fumed and sneered in fury, ‘careless, irresponsible swine! ‘They don’t want to work’. ‘They laze about!’ ‘They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth. (41)

Instead of giving him pity, they even make that abuse as an interesting show and a chance to be involved in such a pleasure time which gives them satisfaction. The incident becomes the way of the caste Hindu to dehumanize the untouchables. Bakha has to shout in the street about his approach to avoid another contact or touch with the upper caste people. He shouts, “posh keep away, posh sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!”(57) But there was a smouldering rage in his soul. His feelings would rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire, in fitful unbalanced jerks when the recollection of some abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindle a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him.

Moreover, as a human being of dignity, there are emotions aroused in Bakha’s deep inside that the crowd are not cared or understood. He feels anger, sadness and is totally isolated and alienated from social interaction. As a human being, Bakha feels and knows that all the abuses he experienced are unfair. However, his consciousness of his status as an untouchable makes him only keep his silent revolt and do what the caste Hindus want him to do. Considered the cursed and treated like dirty dog, the outcastes or dalits are not allowed to make presence in a sacred place like temple. They have no right to worship the same gods and in the same temple as the Hindus do. It is clearly shown with sarcasm:

‘The temple stood challengingly before him’, ‘The temple seemed to advance towards him like a monster, and enveloped him’. It is really unjust for Bakha when he secretly peeks into the temple and suddenly the crowd scream: ‘Polluted, polluted, polluted!’ shouted the Brahmin below. The crowd above him took the cue and shouted after him, waving their hands, some fear, others in anger, but all in a terrible orgy of excitement. One of the men in crowd struck out an individual note. ‘Get off the steps, you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! Now we have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, you dog!’ (52-53).

The author through the novel exposes the views and actions of the caste Hindu which make the dalits or the outcastes or the untouchables more oppressed day by day. The upper caste abuse them without any concern of their feelings as human beings. Anand shows his condemnation on the temples as being the instruments of exploitation. He feels that somehow the caste Hindus themselves are responsible for this social discrimination which creates oppression and hopelessness for the outcastes. The high caste use their gods for their own advantage and creates fear in the minds of the outcastes. It is really showing off the exploitation of the outcastes in the name of religion which creates poverty and sufferings. In their daily lives, the girls of untouchables feel hopeless and exploited because they become the target of sex exploitation. The molestation of untouchable women by the so-called custodians of religion is very common. The upper castes look at the outcaste women as the objects of sexual satisfaction. The priests as the middlemen between the god and the worshippers have created a gap between the god and the worshippers to provide the opportunities of exploitation. Pundit Kali Nath in the novel becomes the representation of the exploiters on those women. He is a symbol of hypocrisy and the hunger for sex. Sohini, Bakha’s sister is the victim of the sexual abuse. It is clearly narrated :

Sohini had sat patiently away from the throng, the while it charged the well. The Pundit recognized her as sweeper’s daughter. He had seen her before, noticed her as she came to clean the latrines...— the fresh young whose full breasts with their dark beads of nipples stood out so conspicuously under her muslin shirt, whose innocent look of wonder seemed to stir the only soft chord in his person... ‘Oh, you Lakha’s daughter, come here...’ The priest lifted the can with great effort... handed the water. ‘Have you get enough now?’... ‘Look, why don’t you come and clean courtyard of our house at the temple.’ (21)

The priest pretends to give Sohini some water in order he can assault her. He asks Sohini to clean the temple to be able to molest him: 'Sohini was weeping...She could not speak.. 'And then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts'. When Sohini protests against the sexual assault by Pundit Kali Nath in the temple, he even abuses her for defiling him. The people who gather around, know the truth well but the indecent aggression of the priest toward the untouchable girl is tolerated by them because of the superiority of the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy. Sohini who suffers humiliation understands that the attempt of sexual abuse cannot be retaliated. Bakha's impotent anger even has no value. They have to accept it as untouchables. As it has been explained before that the caste Hindu make the outcastes' position in such a low to deliberately make the outcastes' life always depend on them. This is vividly shown by the writer when Bakha has to go to town for begging food. He has to do this humiliating task because when he does the menial jobs for the castes, he is not paid with money but with leftover bread. This way oppresses Bakha of his human dignity which makes him sad:

Bread for the sweeper, mother,' he shouted again. There was no response. His legs were aching. There was lethargy in his bones, a curious numbness. His mind refused to work. Feeling defeated, he sat down on the wooden platform of a house in the lane. He was tired and disgusted, for he had almost forgotten the cause of his disgust, his experiences of the morning. (56)

Exhausting to wait for generosity of the caste Hindus, he is scolded by a woman because she believes that he has polluted her home. Moreover, disregarding all his fatigues, the woman asks him to do another works before she gives him the food:

What have you done to earn your food to-day, you and your sister? She never cleaned the lane this morning, and you have defiled my home. Come, clean the drain a bit and then you can have this bread. Come, do a work a bit now that you have defiled my home.(59)

The abuse does not stop at the point. She even does not see Bakha's very weak condition, and she asks him to clean the drain. After Bakha finished doing his job, the woman sadistically gives the bread to Bakha in an inhuman manner:

Vay, Bakhya, take this. Here's your bread coming down. (65)

The woman flings the bread from upstairs of her home just as if she has given the food to a dog.

The author then describes how Bakha's father also feels oppressed for his whole life. The story of his father about Bakha's terrible illness when he was a child, has become a kind of acceptance for the outcastes' untouchability and dehumanization. His father tells Bakha:

You know, when you were a little child, I had a nasty experience too. You were ill with fever, and I went to the house of Hakim Bhagawan Das, in this very town. I shouted and shouted, but no one heard me. The untouchables are not only forbidden to use public facilities, but also ignored and disregarded of their humanity by the castes. Their misery, pain, sadness, grief and sorrow are only theirs, but their servile, their services, and their souls belong to the castes. It will be totally different if the nearly-come-to-death person is someone from the upper caste. (70)

His father goes on, But who will listen to a sweeper? For an hour I stood like that in a corner, near the heap of litter which I collected, and I was feeling as if a scorpion was stinging at me. That I couldn't buy medicine for my son when I was willing to pay my hard-earned money for it, troubled me... "Still there is a little breath left in my child's body, Hakim ji, I shall be your slave all my life. The meaning of my life is my child. Hakim ji, take pity. God will kind to you. ... 'I began to shed tears,' Lakha continued, and said, "Maharaj, Great One, I forgot. Your shoes on my head. I am not in my senses. Maharaj, you are my father and mother. I can't compensate for the medicines. I can only serve you"(73). The quotation shows how Bakha's father, a man who was conscious about his position as an untouchable and had no money to pay for the medicine that his child needed to survive, had to beg and offer his whole life to be the doctor's slave as the payment for that medicine. The untouchables' humanity has not become an important concern of the castes but their servitudes.

The novel *Untouchable* reflects oppression in human life. Exploitation refers to relation of domination and exploitation—economic, social, and psychological. In this novel, people feel exploited because they are excluded from social interaction and economic life. The exploitation is felt through the prohibition of uses of public facilities such as school, temple, well, street, and such. Anand shows that the caste system creates exploitation and discrimination that result in dehumanization. The untouchables or the dalits or the outcastes are treated roughly and regarded as sub-human by their exploiter, the high castes or the Hindus. The high casted are boast of their superiority on the inferior. The high castes view that the outcastes are polluted and the cursed so they are not deserved to be touched and just deserve to place in slum and congenial place to live. They are cut off from all the economic life because there are no professions open to them except cleaning

the latrines, drains and sweeping the yards and street. They are not paid with money in return but just leftover of bread. Although they are intelligence and hard workers, it is not enough for them to have proper jobs. This condition creates the hideous grief which makes them suffer and hopeless in their whole lives. In conclusion, Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable* vividly conveys human exploitation generally experienced by low class people and particularly outcaste people or Untouchables in Indian society.

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