

Volume-1, Issue-VI, Sept- 2017

Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

CONFERENCE

of

**Thiruvalluvar University
College of Arts & Science, Arakkonam.**

on

**"EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE & LITERATURE"**



Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN NO- 2456-7078 IMPACT FACTOR- 4.520 VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, SEPT-2017

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL AGONIES OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE

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ABSTRACT

Untouchable shows the realistic picture of society. In this novel Mulk Raj Anand has portrayed a picture of untouchable. Anand, is the representative of all down trodden society in pre-independence of India. The paper is concerned with the evils of untouchability and the need for radical empathy. Problem of untouchability is still prevalent in the society and Mulk Raj Anand through his novel Untouchable brings to light the sorrows and sufferings that high caste Hindus inflict on the untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable, is more compact than his other novels. The novel Untouchable, published in 1935, centres around a sweeper boy, Bakha. The eighteen year boy Bakha, son of Lakha, the jamadar of sweepers is a child of the twentieth century, and the impact of new influences reverberates within him.

KEY WORDS:

Realistic, Society, Evils, Sorrows, Prevalent

INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand was an eminent Indian writer in English, notable for his depiction of the lives of the low castes in traditional Indian society. The ideas that Anand focus on his novels are problems as casteism and human suffering caused by a variety of factors-political, economic, social and cultural. Through the character Bakha in Untouchable, Anand highlight the condition of inhumanity faced by them in the society. The untouchable covers the event of a single day in the life of the low caste boy Bakha, in the town of Bulashah. In this novel Bakha is a universal figure to show the oppression, injustice, humiliation to the whole community of the outcastes in India. Bakha symbolizes the exploitation and oppression which has been the fate of untouchables like him. His anguish and humiliation are not of his alone, but the suffering of whole outcastes and underdogs. The central figure in the novel is Bakha, a sweeper boy. Bakha, an eighteen year old untouchable boy, like his father Lakha,

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a sweeper, a cleaner of latrines, is regarded as an outcaste by the society. The hero is simultaneously a rebel and victim. He protests and resents against the callousness of caste Hindus.

The novel describes a single day in the life of Bakha; the untouchable belonging to the scavenger caste, commonly known as bhangi in many Indian languages. The work of this caste was to clean toilets and streets and keeps them clean for the upper castes. The living conditions of the untouchables were extremely squalid and they were forced to reside in kutchra mud-walled, single-roomed cottages. There was not proper system of drainage and there was foul smell everywhere.

The readers will realize the humiliation and physical as well as mental agonies of the untouchables throughout the novel. It was very heart rending to know that the so-called upper castes have not even accepted the lower castes with equality. In this novel, Anand succeeds in exposing the oppression, injustice, exploitation to the whole community of the outcastes in India.

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. The consciousness of that prettiness which people's compliments stimulated in her, made the young woman vaguely surmise it all. They were not permitted even to take water from a well and had to wait for hours for the mercy of the upper caste. The food will be given to them by throwing and if they touch anybody by accident they will be punished. The upper class however doesn't find this untouchability when they molest their teen girls. More humiliation is in store for Bakha before his day is out. His curiosity takes him to a local temple, and he becomes inquisitive to see the hidden mystery in the temple. While Bakha was peering through the window he was interrupted by the priest shouting "Polluted! Polluted!" Meanwhile the crowd gathered and shouted him by saying: "Get off the steps you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service!" The privileged castes Hindus assert their superiority over the outcastes by inflicting pain on them.

The representations of both Gandhi and the poet prove also confusing alternatives for Bakha. On the one hand, Gandhi articulates that the plight of untouchability is both a "moral and religious" issue. "He regards Untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism" (146). and asserts that it is "satanic" to assume anyone in Hinduism is born polluted. Gandhi then recounts the story of a Brahmin boy and a sweeper in his ashram and attempts to show understanding for the sweeper; he feels that if the Brahmin "wanted the ashram sweeper to do his work well he must do it himself and set an example" (148). Yet this action, while appearing to be sympathetic and understanding, only undermines the very existence of an untouchable because it assumes that the untouchable is incapable of doing such menial work well. Further, it implies and confirms an existing hierarchy of power between the untouchable and other high caste Hindus because it suggests that they must be taught to be untouchables, which only perpetuates the cycle of oppression. Gandhi then proceeds to criticize the Untouchables by saying that they have to "cultivate habits of cleanliness," that they must get rid of their "evil habits" such as "drinking liquor, gambling and eating carrion."

CONCLUSION

Bakha recollected the words of his speech. It all seemed to stand out in his mind. The Mahatma had talked of a Brahman who did the scavenging in his ashram. He began to move His virtues lay in his close-knit sinews and in his long-breathed sense. He was thinking of everything, he had heard though he could not understand it all. He was calm as he walked along, the conflict in his soul was not over, and

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he was torn between his enthusiasms for Gandhi and the difficulties in his own awkward, native self. "The sun descended, the pale, the purple, the mauve of the horizon blended into darkest blue. A handful of stars throbbed in the heart of the sky" (150).

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