CHAPTER - II

UNTOUCHABLE AND THE ROAD

To begin with the words of W.H. Hudson:

Literature is the vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language […] (Hudson 10).

Literatures in general and novel in particular seem to amalgamate in itself two main ingredients - the individuality of the novelist and his literary milieu. One of the main duties of great writer is to represent the society and its various influence in his art. In other words, literature and society are the two facets of the same coin; they are interwoven both internally and externally.

Indian fiction in English is said to be dominantly got recognized with Mulk Raj Anand. Among various Indo-Anglian novelists, Anand occupies an enviable position. He is said to have modernised the Indian novel. His love for novelty and originality enabled him to carry the tradition of Tagore and Premchand, Bankim and Sharat Chandra to new heights. In all his novels he appears as a social critic. The society, he has seen and observed in the field of his work is a social reality. When we read his novels, we find the large majority of the questions raised by him are social questions., Questions of tradition, norms and genres, etc. His purpose in writing fiction has been to focus on the miseries of
the underdogs of society caused by the exploitations of the capitalists or the feudal lords or by the impact of Industry on the traditional and agricultural way of life.

Anand is an objective delineator of Indian social reality and has dealt extensively in his novels with the most vital aspects of Indian life in all its social, political, economic and cultural manifestations. Though his novels are written in English they form an integral part of the significant trend of social realism in the Indian novel. His ideology is imbued with an acute social awareness and a distinctive sense of responsibility towards life. He desires a radical transformation of the Indian society and depicts the multiple tensions existing at various levels as between the feudal orthodoxy and bourgeois progressivism or between capitalist acquisitiveness and socialist collectivism. His novels encompass the wide spectrum of class and caste hierarchies from the highest princes and Brahmins to the lowest coolies and untouchables. Anand’s first protagonists are sweepers, coolies, and plantation workers. These characters are a new phenomenon in Indian Literature. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that:

In writing of the pariahs and the bottom dogs rather than of the elect and the sophisticated”, he had ventured into territory that had been largely ignored till then by Indian writers. “For all their nationalistic fervour, Bankim Chandra’s novels were but romances distantly imitative of Scott, with a historical or mystical slant; Tagore was chiefly interested in the upper and middle classes, and Sarat Chandra in the lower middle classes and Munshi Prem Chand chose his themes from the peasantry and humble folk of Uttar Pradesh. None of them cared to produce realistic or naturalistic fiction after the manner of Balzac or a Zola. It was Anand’s
aim to stray lower still than even Sarat Chandra or Prem Chand, to show to the west that there was more in the Orient than could be inferred from Omar Khayaam Lipo Tagore or Kipling and so he described a waif like Munoo in Coolie and Untouchable like Bakha, and an indentured labourer like Gangu, and set them right at the centre of the scheme of cruelty and exploitation that held India in its vicious grip (Iyengar XXIV).

It is highly significant that Anand’s very first novel, Untouchable, is a triumphant assertion of his humanitarianism. To choose an untouchable as hero in the year 1935 was, in a sense, a revolutionary gesture in Indian fiction in general. It was the privilege of handsome middle class youths to play that pivotal role, in most cases. In fact, with the solitary exception of U. Laxminarayana’s Malapalli (Colony of untouchables, 1921), the untouchable does not figure at all in fiction in the several Indian languages until then. Even in Marathi, one of the most progressive of Indian literatures, the untouchable first appears in 1941, with S.M Mate’s evocative short stories about the lives of the untouchables in Maharashtra.

Equally significant is another feature of Anand’s choice of his hero. We generally think of all untouchables as a single class occupying the lowest rung of the social ladder; but ironically enough, there was an accepted hierarchy within this class, and the lowest of the low were the sweepers, especially the latrine cleaners. This was obviously because they were not only ritually impure, like others in the same classes, but physically impure, owing to the very nature of their work, during the course of which they came into actual contact with human excreta. To make Bakha, the latrine-cleaner, the hero of his novel was therefore a brave gesture on the part of Anand.
Being a minute observer of human situation in the realistic tradition of fiction, Anand exposes social hypocrisy and taboos, class exploitation and class struggle, social and economic injustice, and the atrocities committed on the oppressed disheveled lot. He depicts human beings who are enmeshed in poverty and injustice, struggling to come out but shackled by the coils of evil. The village-money lenders, priests, tea-planters and caste Hindus treat them as beasts. The novelist favours the degraded people – the peasant, the sweeper, the city drudge, the sepoy, the labourer – the miserable human beings. As a champion of equality, justice and fair play, Anand accords to his characters the touch of magnanimity.

Anand’s heroes are “the reflections of the real people” he has known during the early period of his life. They are not the figments of his imagination but the flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood. In other words, they are part and parcel of his life. He is indebted to them for inspiring him to grow into maturity and enabling him “to interpret the truth from the realities of life”. His heroes can be described as real encounters in the world, allowing him to have a close look at life and distilling truth from it with the full understanding of a ripe man.

Anand’s realism is seen in his portrayal of all aspects of life, even the ugly and the seamy ones. He does not eliminate the ugly aspects of human nature from his picture of life. Filth and dirt is as much a part of life as beauty, cleanliness and decency. It is not that he loves ugliness, but realism demands it if it is there in actual life. What we call beauty is only skin–deep and under the thin veneer of this beauty lies a lot of dirt and filth. The novel, Untouchable begins with a scene of public latrines, scenes of dirty
bazaars, lanes, alleys, of gutters in which the flows of dirty water is obstructed soil filth and of children easing themselves.

The social realism of Anand has been commented upon but it is worthwhile to recapitulate its significant elements; the social stratification manifesting itself in the caste system; the misdirected zeal of the traditionalists in emphasizing the ‘spiritual to the exclusion or detriment of material well-being; and the deliberated stress on individual salvation divorced from social realities; the socio-economic system which perpetuates class differences in an hierarchical set-up buttressed by religious fundamentalists with their theories of karma and rebirth; the greed of a few to subjugate and exploit other people manifesting in a capitalist ethic and in imperialist colonialism. Anand’s *Untouchable* deals with the curse of caste system.

The chief reason why Bakha strikes us as the authentic article, and not a pasteboard, romantic low-class hero is that Anand as a boy, had actually played with untouchable boys, when his father was working in a regiment, to which a sweeper colony was attached. This was a kind of an experience rarely available to a middle class boy. And since childhood experiences leave an indelible mark on writer’s consciousness (Dickens being perhaps the best example of it) Bakha was probably at the back of Anand’s mind over the years awaiting his fictional density. E.M. Forster aptly says:

*Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character, because he would not have known enough about his troubles and no untouchable could have written the book.
because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity

(Untouchable VI).

*Untouchable*, a tour de force, is basically tragic drama of the individual caught in the net of the age old caste system. Mulk Raj Anand, the doyen of Indian English Literature, through a gallery of characters creates here a deep and dense web of actualities and eventualities. His created cosmos in the novel bears a direct resemblance to the actual one. As a matter of fact, the whole novel is series of graphic and moving scenes with the hero as the central focus. According to K.R.S. Iyengar it is the “photographic fidelity that convinces at once, though it overwhelms us by its cumulative ferocity of detail” (Iyengar 339).

*Untouchable*, a creative debut, burst forth on the literary horizon in 1935 presents the most comprehensive and logistic outlook on the problem of Untouchability. Anand’s darling effort of choosing a Dalit as the hero covers the terra-incognita for introducing “into creative narrative… whole new peoples who have seldom entered the realms of literature of India” (Anand 79). The novel came up when the untouchables had emerged as a potent political force and Gandhi was trying to win over them. This novel came into being after a meaningful discourse of Anand with Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram and also with a literary support of E.M. Forster.

*Untouchable*, presents before us the stark reality of the Indian society and hence it may be regarded as a revolutionary novel bringing to light the revolutionary ideas of Anand. It should be kept in mind that Untouchability in pre-Independent India meant something very different from what alienation has meant and means in the west. “Bakha
unlike Stephiin Daedalua of Joyce’s portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses
never had the choice of self imposed exile” (Tiwari 38).

He had never taken an education that could help him as it helped Stephen-and
could give him moral direction. Rather, Bakha is an untouchable by birth and has to
remain till doom. He is taken as dirt because he cleans and touches dirt. This was the
position of millions of Bakhas in our country. For Anand, it is unacceptable and hence
creation of Bakha’s inner life makes Untouchable the kind of novel that has great social
as well as human significance. Mulk Raj Anand had great sympathy and grave concern
for the untouchables who were subjected to humiliating discrimination and inhuman
cruelty in every walk of life. In all Bakha does very little. He neither leads an insurrection
nor runs away nor tries actively to change his circumstances.

In his preface to Ralph Fox The Novel and the People (1944) Mulk Raj Anand
describes the tenets of social realism:

…It is necessary to point out that nothing could be more superficial than
the general idea current among many people that it [social realism] simply
means “reportage” or a cut and dried method of writing political tracts
about the poor in which the rich appear, if at all, merely as a decadent
villains of the piece. The very contrary of this is true… It is a method to
ensure the deepest, broadest and most sensitive imaginative awareness of
men at a given time and place by the writer, so that it bears the fullest and
richest representation of historical man as he develops in the society of his
time, through all the gamut of inner and outer conflict, a full-blown
character with all his strength and weaknesses (Anand 15).

Anand is fully aware of the historical sense in such a literary perspective because
man cannot be isolated from society and society itself is not static but a dynamic whole
having a past, present and future. Man’s fate is tied with that of society but it is no
absolute entity, being susceptible to change in various ways. The relationship between
man, society, fate and change can be observed only in the historical perspective.

Anand is not concerned with Untouchability in the abstract as some sociological
problem but with the torments, physical, mental and spiritual and all real, experienced by
Bakha, a young sweeper in the course of a day. The use of the sweeper’s consciousness
as the medium through which to comprehend a sociological problem is both realistic and
convinging. A detailed analysis of this problem with a number of characters and a large
canvas would have blighted the effect and blurred the focus this choice of a day in the life
of Bakha gives to the novel its unity, the unity of classical antiquity of which Forster
takes special note. He writes, “This book is simply planned but it has form. The action
occupies one day, and takes place in a small area” (Forster VII). This simplicity of form
is the result of Anand’s acute awareness of an untouchable’s plight and has helped him,
as Forster notes, in “avoiding “rhetoric and circumlocution” and in going “straight to the
heart of the subject” (Forster V) to purify it.

In almost all his writings Anand shows his righteous and human indignation and...
“disgust for the cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian feudal life, with its castes, creeds, dead
habits and customs and its religious rites and practices” (Anand 86). His protest against
the inhuman institution of caste, which he has attacked in *Untouchable*, and *The Road* emanated from his pity for Bakha and Bhikhu, the protagonists of *Untouchable* and *The Road* respectively. His indignation against the caste system also springs from how it has existed for over two thousand years, despite the fact that it was non-existent in society in ancient times. In view of its absence in Vedic age, the ideologists believe that it was later invented by self-seeking interests. Hence it must be an enlightening study to look into its genesis, evolution and how it was sanctified by religion.

A study of cultural life of Indian people would reveal that the institution of caste did not exist in the earliest society, a fact extolled in his writings by Anand himself. The literary accounts of the Vedic age, which are the only source and guide for the study of the epoch, bear it out. The *Rig-Veda*, which represents the cultural ethos of the earliest Indians, evidences how the society functioned in accordance with the principle of Varna-Vyavastha.

The hymns of the *Rig-Veda* unequivocally speak of the existence of the enlightened social institutions; neither the professions were determined by heredity; nor law of endogamy governed a group. Nor was there any taboo on commongetherness; with people hailing from the various groups dining together. A poet in the *Rig-Veda* refers to the social mobility of the age.

A bard I am, my father a leech,
And my mother is a grinder of corn,
Diverse in means, but all striving,
Equally we strive for cattle. (*Rig-Veda*)
It is clear from the hymn cited above, people of the same family followed various occupations. The gamut of social relations was not contaminated by the concept of high and low. The society, being rationally divided among the classes, the early Aryans carried on social obligations which were commensurate with their abilities and aptitude. Hence, there was nothing 'divine, sacred and mythical in the origin of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas. V.M. Apte rightly observes:

. . . “In the earliest society represented by the bulk of the *Rig- Veda*, there were probably different classes and professions but none, not even the priestly and warrior classes were hereditary; the warriors were drawn from the people at large and any person with requisite qualifications could officiate as a priest” (Apte 390). The evolution of sacrificial cult delivered a blow to simple mode of worship practiced in the early Vedic Society V.M. Apte pointedly remarks:

There is no longer the spontaneity or simplicity of religious feeling that is associated in large measure with the sacrifice in the age of the *Rig- Veda*.

Although the theory of the sacrifice is superficially “I give thee (O God) that thou mayest give”, there is no little faith in it, that sympathetic magic dominates the entire sacrificial system. The priest has arrogated to himself such powers in this regard, that he could ruin (if he pleased) even the patron from whom he officiated by deliberately committing errors. The efficacy of the ritual depends on the correct pronunciation of the mantras recited, because it was their sound rather than meaning that was credited with power (Apte 447).
The mechanical sacerdotalism evolved by the priests benefited the priestly class. The priesthood became a source of extortion of gifts from both, the prince and the pauper. They created vested interests in priesthood by another way. Owing to being the composers of religious hymns, which were cited on the occasions of sacrifice, they incorporated in the hymns such norms as grant of gifts to be given to the priests as would benefit the priests.

Obviously, the low job such as those of menial workers and field labourers became reserved for the Sudras in the post-Vedic age. A large segment of people was thus excluded from owning the productive means. Hence the above perusal brings home the fact that four-fold functional system (Varnasram Vyavastha) slowly but surely degenerated into caste system during the post-Vedic age.

The rigidity of caste system set in an indignant revolt against it. The people’s urge for a change in its rigidity is reflected in the rise of reformatory movements like Buddhism, Jainism and rationalist school of philosophy as that of Carvaka in the sixth century B.C. Buddha’s emphasis in his teachings on goodness of action rather than on chance of birth attracted the depressed classes to Buddhist fold. The social and spiritual equalities promised in Buddhist fold endeared Buddha to the masses, because the authors of Dharma-Sutras had condemned the outcastes to deplorable existence. So much so, that they had evolved ‘the theory of Untouchability’. The belief that mere touch of an untouchable may result in high caste being contaminated was given formal sanction in Dharma Sutras. In the words of Apte: “We see in the Dharma-Sutras the beginning of the formal theory of defilement resulting in the taboo of all contact on the part of pure men of the upper castes with an impure man, namely, a member of the lowest caste” (Apte 516).
‘Not only was the theory of segregation of the outcastes from the caste Hindus invented but caste order was made more complicated as society moved ahead. Society was thus moving in retrograde direction. The writers of the Smritis wove myths and legends around even such cellar institutions as state kingship and caste. Manu, for example authoritatively declares that the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Sudras issued forth from the mouth, arms, thigh and foot respectively of the Brahma.

According to Manu: “Now, for the sake of preserving all this creation, the most glorious (Being) ordained separate duties for those sprang from (his) mouth, arm, thigh (and) feet” (Hopkins 12).

Manu, in concocting the theory of Divine Origin of caste order, has laid emphasis on two points. First, the Sudra sprang from ‘the most impure part of the legendary Purush and hence they were the lowest beings. Secondly, the members of every caste must obey the laws of caste, since by doing so they obey the ‘divine dispensation. Under such dispensation since the twice born castes would perform important functions as those of warriors, military and civil officers, priests, teachers and traders, they felt no constraint in carrying out these duties. But the duties of the Sudras were altogether different. Menial service to the caste Hindu, particularly to the Brahmins became the eternal lot of the Sudras. Manu emphatically states; “But a Sudra, whether bought or not bought, (the Brahman) may compel to practise servitude, for that (Sudra) was created by the self existent merely for the service of the Brahman” (Hopkins 243).

Further, if the ordinance of Manu bear testimony to state of the caste order, the lot of the low castes people was worse than that of a slave. A slave can dream of better days after his release from the captivity of his master. But the laws of caste under Hindu social
order chained the Sudras in such iron chains from which one could never aspire for freedom. No matter, however talented a low caste person could be, he was denied the opportunities to develop his talent since caste laws forced servitude on him. He was believed to be born with innate instincts to serve, hence was chained in steel shackles of slavery. Manu again authoritatively declares: “Even if freed by his master, the Sudra is not released from servitude; for this is innate in him: who then can take it from him”? (Hopkins 243).

In order to coerce the lower caste people into performing the meanest functions, it was incumbent upon the king to see to it that they followed caste-assigned duties. Any infringement by low caste of the caste order was considered as the greatest sin. Whereas obedience to caste laws could preserve the caste order which, in turn, could hold up the universe, any defiance of caste system, Manu believes, might cause the universe to move.

After the theory of Karma was concocted, the birth in a family of Sudra was looked upon as retribution of the sins of the previous birth or births. However, a Sudra could avoid being born in low caste and be entitled to be born in high caste, if he meekly performed the caste duties, rendering service to high caste, without grumbling and complaining. Manu elaborates the theory of Karma: “If he be pure, obedient to the higher castes, mild in speech, without conceit and always submissive to the Brahmans, he attains [in the next trans-migration] a high birth” (Hopkins 303).

As a result of concoction of such theories, the status of the untouchables sank down to the lowest level in social scale. Hence the untouchables received treatment no better than meted out to animals. In social life they suffered from numerous disabilities.
In matter of residence, they were forced to live on outskirts of village or town. R.K. Mookarjee, quoting Jataka stories, points out: …” How the Chandalas were treated as despised out-castes doomed to live outside the city or village and their very sight was regarded as impure” (Mookarjee 544).

Thus in Untouchable, Anand is deeply concerned with a social problem of national dimension and he takes up the role of a writer committed to eradication of the evils of society. As Srinivas Iyengar points: “The novel presents the picture of a place of society, and of certain persons, nor easily to be forgotten picture is that also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy (Iyengar 264).

The scene of this novel is laid in a remote village named Bulasha somewhere in the interior of the Punjab. This is a small village and, in it is separately marked out the outcaste’s colony:

A group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer man, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and others and other outcastes from Hindu society… (Untouchable 1)

Mulk Raj Anand then goes on describing how for want of a drainage system the rains in various seasons, turned the whole place into a marsh, which gave out the most offensive stink. Near the bank of the brook which passed through a lane, was the dirt and the filth of the public latrines situated there, and the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows
and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. The biting, choking and pungent fumes oozed out from the entire place. In such an outcaste’s colony lived Bakha, the hero of the novel, with his father, brother and sister and here he carried on his duties of cleaning the public latrines. Among the outcaste themselves, there is hierarchy. Untouchable, has the immediacy of the true voice of feeling. It reflects fully the image of a decadent society and conveys the sense of deeply felt life.

The dehumanizing laws of caste sanctioned by Hinduism condemned a teeming millions of Hindu family to hellish existence. They were completely cut off from social main stream; untouchability came to be practised with great rigidity. In order to ensure the segregation of low caste from high ones the former were not only doomed to live outside a village, but while moving about a street, they had to strike sticks to warn the high castes to avoid their touch. They had no share in the management of economic forces as they were obliged to follow such low occupations, as handling dirt, scavenging, fish selling, and shoe making and repairing, and removing the hides of the dead animals. That the rigid system of caste, with its attendant evils of untouchability had cast its evil shadow on the annals of history in fifth century AD is clear from the accounts of foreigners. Foreigners like Fa-hein and Huen Tsang witnessed how the laws of Untouchability were required to be practised by the Untouchables. In the words of U.N. Ghoshal:

In Madhya desa, at the beginning of the fifth century, as Fa-hein tells us, the Chandalas were required to live outside the boundaries of towns and market places on approaching which they had to strike a piece of wood as a warning to others to avoid their touch. For them was reserved the
occupation of hunters and dealers in fish. In the first part of seventh century, according to Hiuen Tsang, butchers, executioners, scavengers, etc. (corresponding no doubt to Chandals and similar caste) lived in dwellings marked by a distinctive sign and lying outside the city. The references in the literature of the Gupta period confirm to above accounts. We learn from them how the Chandals were regarded as untouchables (Ghoshal 662-663).

Anand shows complete understanding of the human motives and a sensitive discrimination of moral values. Anand’s own childhood memories find dramatic reflection in the novel. Bakha has not surrendered to his fate like his father Lakha. He is a child of twentieth century and is given to modern way of dressing. “from a Tommy he has secured a pair of old breeches and from a sepoy a pair old boots; he would, if he could, like to look like the white foreigner and so be in the ‘fashion’” (Untouchable 3). He dreams of a good life but as soon as morning dawns his job of toilette cleaning starts. Three rows of toilettes to be cleaned and that too single-handedly. He has to repeat this process several times in a day. Maintenance of cleanliness is the challenging Job he has been allotted and he performs it efficiently though society does not treat him as a human being, he proves to be more human than the so called protectors of humanity.

The water problem among the untouchables is depicted through the ‘well incident’. They were not allowed to touch even the brook or pond, as they would contaminate the stream. They had to wait hours beside the well and had to request the upper castes to pour water in their pitchers they weren’t allowed to ‘touch anything that touchable touched’. Anand has presented the situation very realistically as they had to
“Joining their hands with servile’ humility to every passer-by; cursing their fate and bemoaning their lot, if they were refused the help they wanted; praying, beseeching and blessing, if some generous should condescended to listen to them or to help them”

(Untouchable 15) This is the cruelest irony of life that even for water, the basic necessity of human existence, the sweepers have to depend on the mercy of the caste Hindus. In the novel, we go through a very ironic situation in which some untouchables collected at the foot of the well making a servile appeal to an illiterate a sepoy who happened to pass that way:

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, others twisting their a lips in various attitudes of servile appeal and abject humility as they remained seated separate (Untouchable 18).

Anand not only criticizes the high caste people for ill-treating and exploiting the untouchable but also is conscious that even among the lower castes scale consider the lower ones to be inferior to them and exploit them. Sohini being the lowest caste among the outcastes, is naturally looked down upon by Gulabo a washerwoman who calls her ‘ a bitch of sweeper woman’ as she is her ‘potential rival’ and may surpass her in beauty ‘ in the eyes of man’. Thus she wants to use Sohini’s lower caste as a handle to keep her away so that she herself may appear to advantage before men folk, and attract them without Sohini coming in her way.
Anand has also shown that not only is the Hindu society divided into the untouchables and the upper caste Hindus, but the untouchables also have their own hierarchy, with in the untouchables in a higher social status refusing to mix up with those who occupying a lower rung of the social ladder and even ill-treating them this becomes clear from the way in which Gulabo, a washer woman, ill-treats and avoids Sohini, Bakha’s sister. In Dr. Ambedkar’s view “the caste system is a social division of people of the same race and is not merely a division of labour but also a division of labourers” (Dhananjay Keer 269).

When Bakha’s young and beautiful sister Sohini, goes to a village well to fetch water, she has to hear abuses of other castes as she belongs to the lowest caste. The orthodox custom is that she cannot take out water from the well, like the people belonging to other castes and has, therefore, to depend on some gentleman who can give her water. At last pundit Kalinath agrees to get water for her. He tries to have a full glance of the zestful youth of Sohini, though his body has got numerous wrinkles due to old age. Ghurye says . . . The Asprishya – Sudras castes whose touch is so impure as to pollute even the Ganges Water, and hence their contact must be avoided. They are thus the untouchables (Ghurye 40). “Even the wells are polluted if a low caste man draws water from them; but a great deal depends on the character of the vessel used and of the well from which water is drawn” (Ghurye 40).

Skipping all others who had gathered to take water, Kalinath turns his attention towards Sohini and pours water into her bucket and thus, gives an indication to her that she should come the next day to his house to clean the courtyard. When she goes to clean the courtyard, he tries to molest her. Sohini tries to save her chastity by crying. When
exposed, he cries out, “polluted, polluted,” and accuses her of defiling the platform and polluting him by her physical proximity to him. The cunning and hypocritical nature of Kalinath’s behaviour is exposed by Anand. Brahmin priests feel proud of their religiosity and do ugly things and behave indecently. Such brazen insolence of the Brahmin priest is tolerated by the Hindu society, because in the caste hierarchy Brahmin is superior to everybody else. In the meantime, Bakha also comes there as he has been deputed by his father to sweep the streets. He hears the abuses of Kalinath and sends Sohini back home to avoid her humiliation.

When five Dalit women were trying to get water they were inhumanly and brutally attacked by the caste Hindus. Anupama Rao writes:

Five women tried to fill water at the common well at about Ten a.m., Savarnas (caste Hindus) tried to stop them, and Dalit men tried to resist. Twelve of the accused men went the next day and dragged the women out of their houses. The Sarpanch (head of the village or governing body) and Police Patil were among the accused. They stripped the women and paraded them naked from street to street. May be 50-70 people were actually involved the men were armed with sticks (Anupama Rao 218).

The evildoer and corrupt Kalinath is adjudged as pure and the innocent Sohini is taken to be corrupted by the hypocritical society. The society treats a sweeper only as sweeper sans any human feelings and emotions. Bakha is badly frustrated by the caste prejudices and tries to find the solution from a third party as he gets none.
The portrayal of bazaar is very outstanding and real. It reflects the true image of Indian market. Bakha’s suppressed wishes and desires seem to burst out. His passion for fashion, for being unconventional, for doing everything possible to look like an English sahib, is obviously perceptible his craze for fashion and modernity voice the suppressed dreams of millions of outcastes living across the country.

Anand gives a glimpse of the attitude of the upper caste Hindu people towards the sweeper boy belonging to the lowest of the low castes. While walking along the ill-built roads, he looks at several shops in a sequence with yearning eyes and he becomes tempted to purchase a packet of Red-Lamp brand Cigarettes. He pays one anna coin. The shopkeeper “flung a packet of Red-Lamp Cigarettes at Bakha as a butcher might through a bone to an insisting dog sniffing round the corner of his shop” (Untouchable 34). “Keep away, keep away” don’t come riding on at me. Do you want me another bath this morning?” As an ardent follower of hackneyed customer and ritual, sprinkles water around to purify his shop this is a devastating experience of humiliation.

Mencher considers “caste as a system of exploitation, rather than a system of interdependence and reciprocity caste marks socio-economic differences” (Sharma196). But it “haunts the body politic of post colonial India . . . it has become the subject of national shame” (Sharma 202). Caste is history, a reality of Indian Social fabric . . . As history can be twisted, caste has also been manipulated, and it continues to be so even today.

Bakha realizes that how Hindu society is a society of hypocrites. Brahmins, who are proud of their religiousness, shun certain sections of human beings. And they feel that
they have been polluted so much by being merely touched by an untouchable. The untouchables while walking through the streets are supposed to announce their traditional approach. “posh, posh, sweeper coming”. (Untouchable 42) When Bakha goes to sweep market and the temple courtyard, he passes by shop of sweetmeat seller and his mouth waters to take some sweets. He buys jalebis worth four annas and this sets him in a series of humiliations, and curses. Much delighted and tasting sweets, Bakha forgets to announce his approach and accidentally touches a caste Hindu, and earns, in turn abuse accompanied by a slap and jalebis in his hand fall down in the dust. The so called polluted Lalla shouts: “you have touched me […]. I will have to bathe now and purify myself, anyhow well, take this for your damned irresponsibility you son of swine”! (Untouchable 41).

The town provides the scene of the second phase of his experience and adds a new dimension to his predicament. His life at the cantonment is all sweat and blood in the midst of surroundings that sink and putrefy. The town particularly accentuates the consciousness of social indignity. As if these injuries were not enough, Hindu society snarls at him:

Keep to the side of the road, you lowcaste vermin… 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. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning (Untouchable 38).
To J.H. Hutton, “Caste appears to be an institution of highly complex origin, an origin so complex indeed that in its very nature it must be limited to a single area, and that, no doubt, is why it is only found in India”. Hutton further observes that caste is exclusively an Indian phenomenon. Its complexity, elaboration and rigidity are not found elsewhere. It is unique (Sharma 184).

The exploitation based on caste consideration is presented in this novel. We may call it social exploitation, exploitation carried on by the entire society on the casteless people known as Untouchables. Sweepers and cobblers are regarded outside the fold of Hindu castes, though they firmly believe in the cannons of Hindu religion. Leather workers and washer men, though Untouchables are regarded superior to sweepers. The very touch of the sweeper is regarded polluting. Mulk Raj Anand has pointed very vividly and forcefully the mental anguish that Bakha experiences. Bakha a sensitive sweeper boy who is the hero of the novel feels at the treatment meted out to him by the caste Hindus.

The slap on the face of Bakha, which is the focal point of the novel, makes him only realize his social position in the given social order. No doubt, he is Anand’s enlightened child of modern India but the hostile situation is so over powering that he could only emerge as a romantic visionary who cannot immediately act. Anand uses the fire image as a symbolic device to bring out, as G.S. Amur interprets, “Bakha’s unconscious identification with fire” (Amur 47). In fact, the fire image has been derived by Anand from the day to day duties of Bakha as a scavenger who has to burn the straw collected from the latrines. The fire image “illuminates the dark and unrealized areas of
Bakha’s half-formed consciousness” (Amur 47). Fire is an archetypal symbol of destruction and purification. The images of destruction fascinate Bakha but the raging fire within him would not goad him to act because the physical and the moral barriers are too powerful. Moreover, Bakha as a child of modern India, could only burn within himself and experience a symbolic communion with fire because what he has inherited as the culture of servility and mute submission from his ancestors is also deeply ingrained in his psyche more by reinforcement by the caste-minded society and by the elders of his own community rather than by himself.

The people torture him with abuses, insults and even a small boy has his share by insinuating that Bakha had beaten him. Bakha is all alone, lost and afraid, and is rescued by a Muslim Tongawallah. Anand’s world here is the Dickensian world of oppression and tortures inflicted on the young. He explores the myth of the coherence and the oneness of Hindu society. Bakha is an outcaste not only in the traditional path and even in the market, full of all sorts and varieties of people, he is an object of no significance.

Bakha realised his position in the society. He is physically stronger than his tormentors but he could not revolt against them because of his – social background. He understands the rough behaviour of Hindus. He cannot understand why people are so unfair and tyrannical with those born in low caste families; why they do not realize that the low caste people; too, are made of flesh and blood as are their fellow creatures and, therefore, should be treated as human beings. He understands that he does some useful work for the society. Untouchables toil and till the lands, grow crops in the sun and shower and produce food grains to the country. They build the bridges with their sweat, yet they are being inhumanly ill-treated, humiliated, injured and insulted. Untouchability
is found nowhere in the world, except in India. There is a difference between the master and the slave, haves and have-nots, blacks and whites in other parts of the world. This discrimination in India makes millions of innocent and hardworking people as the victims of this cancerous caste system in India. The Hindus are touching the animals reverently and they worship them. The bull is emitting foul smell and excreting dung on the road. Bakha thinks and he is puzzled over the hypocrisy of the Hindu tradition that is more generous to an animal than to an outcaste. The position of untouchables as E.M. Forster points:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations on his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus, he is a disquieting as well as disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul, and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. It is sometimes said that he is so degraded that he does not mind it, but this is not the option of those who have studied his case... (Forster IV).

The hero of the novel, Bakha suffers i.e., morally, socially and economically. The exploitation of the simple peasants and ignorant people, the blood sucking image of landlords, Sahukers, Seth and more specially, custodians of religion, in the form of priest
etc., is really heart melting. Though, all the low castes of society have fallen a prey to
exploitation by these custodians of society, the sweepers, who are brutally tortured,
belong to the lowest among them. It is the irony of circumstance that sweeper caste is
counted neither in Hindus nor in Muslims. A sweeper being a member of the lowest class
of society is treated worse than a slave who is better in the sense that he can change his
master and subsequently gets different types of tasks at different times. But the sweeper
is a sweeper and will be so.

Anand has been rightly called the Indian version of Charles Dickens; as both are
novelists of protest against the sordid ugly and depressing social conditions of their times.
M.K. Naik has given voice to the feelings of many. He said about Mulk Raj Anand:

At an impressionable age he had become aware of the religious hypocrisy
and bigotry in Indian society and of its injustices thriving anachronistic
practices such as Untouchability, feudalism and economic exploitation, of
the have-nots by the haves. This awareness was sure to make him a
militant critic of the basic elements in the Indian tradition […] He is at
his best when he is exposing the limitations of the decayed Indian
traditional and championing the cause of modernism as a cure for the ills
of the Indian society and when, in doing so, he maintains his balance. He
is also at his best, when he shows the modern Indian drawing both upon
the strength of the native tradition and the lessons learned from his
exposure to western ideas (Naik 72).
The honour of a man is measured by caste in India. Such a clumsy system of our society is very difficult to explain properly and irony is that where as in India we take pride in sticking to this system, nowhere else in the world exists such a rubbish system. Saros cowasjee says: “The Hindu religion is responsible for this fiendish segregation of humanity” (Cowasjee 51). This is right to some extent because the practice of religion is very different from what actually the religion stands for. The practices are basically the consequences of socio-political compulsions. Untouchable has been regarded as a small classic because it highlights the factors that are a nuisance to Indian society in general and Hindu community in particular. The theme of the novel is relation between Untouchable and high caste Hindus. The thought of untouchability cannot be abolished from the Indian society unless man believes in humanity. Even if we want to love all we cannot - life is too short to love. In Untouchable Anand is on sure ground, as he is denouncing an aspect of traditional Hindu society which deserves condemnation. To Quote Forster:

The Indians have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the west, the belief – that the products are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant, and that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose them of are outcastes from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything to devilish. No animal could have hit on it (Forster VI).

In Untouchable it is the touch scene which suddenly brings home to Bakha his real position in social order; it is a moment of self-revelation for him: “… For them I am
a sweeper, sweeper – Untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word: Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!” (Untouchable 43).

Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position, significance of his lot dawned upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that had happened to him traced its course up to this light and got the answer: the contempt of those who came to the latrines daily and complained that there weren’t any latrines clean, the sneers of the people in the outcastes’ colony, the abuse of the crowd which had gathered round him this morning. It was all explicable now.

Anand’s condemnation of Untouchability derives its effectiveness from a total control of all the aspects of his problem. He shows a sure grasp of the psychology of both the caste Hindu and the Untouchable. In this dealings with the latter, the caste Hindu is armed with the feeling of two thousand years of social and class superiority a feeling which refuses to accept the fact that the Untouchable is a human being, but insists on treating him as a sub-human creature, to be ignored or bullied or exploited as the occasion demands.

Rakha, Bakha’s brother is a true representative of the caste to which he belongs. He is dirty and like the French novelists of the naturalistic school, Anand gives a pen-portrait of Rakha in his filthiness. “He has a dirty face on which the flies congregated in abundance to taste of the sweet delights of the saliva on the corners of his lips” (Untouchable 75). All this is disgusting no doubt, but it is a part of life, and so Anand does not hesitate to introduce it in his novel.
The outcastes live in an uncongenial place, which hides “the ugliness, the squalor and the misery” within it. The loneliness and the darkness of their surroundings have passed into their souls. Rakha, Bakha’s younger brother seems a true child of the outcaste’s colony. He had wallowed in its mire, bathed in its marshes, played among its rubbish heaps; his listless, lazy, lousy manner was a result of his surroundings. He was vehicle of a life force, the culminating point in the destiny of which would never come, because malaria lingered in his bones and that disease does not kill but merely dissipates the energy. He was a friend of the flies and the mosquitoes their boon companion since his childhood.

Bakha is conscious that he is not considered human enough even to be touched. He is in the society and yet not of it. He is useful to the society for cleaning the latrines only to be identified with the very dirt he cleans. When Bakha, after his morning round of duties, He is stirred with anguish and anger: “But then he realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the Skelton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants, but a moral one” (Untouchable 39).

Bakha resents much more the passive attitude of his own community. He cannot comprehend their spirit of acceptance. He tells his father “They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt” (Untouchable 70). There is trepidation in his heart as to why he is expected to gulp down the odious abuses why is he supposed to succumb to the humiliation? Why should he keep quiet when his sister is molested? The only answer to those raging questions is the caste barrier. Caste has closed down all avenues of remonstrance. At every incident which has cost him his self-dignity he is seething with
rebellion which does not find an outlet. He is alienated with the growing realisation that he was one against a whole society.

Anand’s view of the interaction between age-old beliefs and social change is rational whereas ritualistic orthodoxy is based on irrational attitudes. But an analytical and empirical approach would have produced a mere catalogue of the Untouchable’s miseries and the novel would have been shaped into predetermined schematic patterns. The life of Bakha is disturbed as he is a child of modern India. He stands in an unconventional position historically and has a sense of his own place in the social order. This awareness is accentuated when he listens to his old father’s experienced and grimly realistic advice, “you should try and get to know them. You have got to work for them all your life, my son, after I die” (Untouchable 68). It shows how old generation people are submissive and want to serve for the uppercaste people.

This goes deep into Bakha and the response “No, no, ‘his mind seemed to say, ‘never’,” shows that he is not ready to reconcile himself to beastly indignities and serf’s predicament. He is in an ironic and peculiarly alienated position. If he clings to his roots he is to be condemned for ever as he is betrayed by the fatalism of his own people. He hates the entire structure in which education is denied to him. His worldly wise father had told him, “schools were meant for the babus, not for the lowly sweepers” He has bitterly learnt that,” these old Hindus were cruel” (Untouchable 30). It shows that how education has been denied to Untouchables for centuries. If they had been taught in schools and colleges they would have revolted the system and have had known about their position. They were in ignorance of darkness and were ill-treated inhumanly.
The law of Chaturvarna prohibited the sudras and untouchables from pursuing knowledge, from engaging in economic enterprises, and from bearing arms, with the result that they could never revolt and became ever reconciled to eternal servitude as an inescapable fate. In short, the caste system deadens, paralyzes and cripples the people from helpful activity. It is a social system which embodies the arrogance and selfishness of a perverse section of the Hindus who were superior enough in social status to set it in fashion and who had the authority to force it on the inferiors. It has killed public spirit, destroyed sense of public charity and narrowed down public opinion. It has restricted a man’s loyalty to his caste, made virtue and morality of caste – ridden caste does not appreciate merits in a man from the other caste.

Their touch, shadow and even voice were deemed by the caste Hindus to be polluting. So they had to clear the way at the approach of a caste Hindu. They were forbidden to keep certain domestic animals, to use certain metals for ornaments; were obliged to wear a particular type of dress, to eat a particular type of food, to use a particular type of footwear and were forced to occupy the dirty, dingy and unhygienic outskirts of villages and towns for habitation where they lived in dark, insanitary and miserable smoky shanties or cottages.

According to Manusmriti “Vedas which were neither to be heard nor to be read by the Sudras and the Atisudras – the untouchables” (Dhananjay keer 18). The evil system of caste has degraded, segregated, and devitalized it. If Sudras and Untouchables are desired to learn. “Molten lead to be poured into the ears of such Sudras as would hear or read the Vedas, and which decried the Sudras, stunted their growth, impaired their self-
respect, and perpetrated their social, economic, religious and political slavery”
(Dhananjay Keer 100). Manusmriti is symbol of inequality, cruelty and injustice.

Bakha wants to read and is ready to pay “an anna per lesson”. This natural
enthusiasm and curiosity to know and learn plays an important part in shaping his
complex personality. One more factor, which shocked Anand badly was religious bigotry,
hypocrisy, formalism and degeneration of institutionalized religion into an instrument of
exploitation. There is temple incident, which shows how Anand is deeply acquainted with
the religious diplomacy, and his emotions towards such situations are clearly picturised:

As if by magic, he (Bakha) is drawn towards the temple and mounts the
first two steps, but the oppressed underdog in him exerts itself and he goes
to streets to collect the litter. The urge to see his god becomes
overwhelming as the ‘temple stood challenging before him’ and then
‘seemed to advance towards him like a monster’ (Untouchable 50).

Bakha’s spontaneous sense of religiosity and his adoration to the unknown God is
in sharp contrast to the superficiality of devotion with which the highcaste Hindus
worship in the temple. As C.D. Narasimhaiah observes, the novelist uses this fine and
devotional gesture of Bakha “to shame the deaf and dumb at heart into a recognition of
their inhumanity to one who while socially very much their interior is in matters of the
spirit infinitely better than they” (Narasimhaiah 114). The bond of love - the family
feeling of being together, eating from the same basket and the same bowl-in vogue in the
house of Bakha is a moment of relief of the gloom of the house. Bakha’s sense of true
delight, his joy in natural surroundings and his commitment to work - ethics are all great human qualities which make Bakha's character a memorable one.

With a sudden onslaught, he captures five of the fifteen steps, another push and he is on the top step, crouched like a dog at the door of a banquet hall. However, unable to suppress his curiosity, he goes near the temple-door and catches just a glimpse of the dark, sanctuary and its idols. He is moved by the chorus of devotees. The smell of incense, the ritualistic chanting, the hoarse shouts of triumphant worshippers over powered him and “his hands joined unconsciously: and his head hung in the worship of the unknown God” (Untouchable 52). But the next movement, Bakha’s homage to his god is answered with the cries of “polluted, polluted,” raised by the temple priest. The whole crowd takes up the cue and starts shouting the same words. Bakha is unnerved.

Ghurye Points out that “The innermost recesses of temples can only be approached by the Brahmins, clean Sudras, and other high castes having to keep outside the sacred precincts. The impure castes and particularly the Untouchables cannot enter even the outer portions of a temple but must keep to the court yards” (Ghurye 43). Another torrent of abuse overpowers him. As if all this were not enough, priest shouts now from near the temple that he too has been polluted, more severely so because he has been defiled by contact of Sohini, Bakha’s sister. As Bakha manages to take Sohini away from the courtyard, she tells him how the priest had made improper suggestions to her when she was cleaning the courtyard. Bakha is furious that the Brahmin dog should be vile enough to accuse his sister polluting him when he had actually tried to seduce her. When he hears the truth, he moves in giant strides to average the insult of his sister. But the poltroon crowd takes to his heels. Only the Gods remain secure in their individual
inches rebuking Bakha with their cold, impersonal stares. Everything in the episode is exact: We have the sweeper’s preoccupation with his Job, the sinister appeal of the temple to the uninitiated, his obeisance to the Gods, the hypocrisy of the priest, the cowardice of the ‘twice born’ Hindu, the hero’s immediate impulse to avenge the insult and his eventual failure to do so. In Ambedkar’s view:

The religion which discriminates between two followers is partial, and the religion which treats crores of its adherents worse than dogs and criminals and inflicts upon them insufferable disabilities is no religion at all. Religion is not the appellation for such an unjust order. Religion and slavery are incompatible (Ambedkar 92).

Untouchability shuts all doors of opportunities for betterment in life to the untouchables. It does not offer and untouchable any opportunity to move freely in society, it compels him to live in dungeons and seclusion; it prevents him from educating himself and from following a profession of his choice. Actually, untouchables were being treated in the same way in those days and the same conditions are prevailing in some parts of the country even today Religious diplomacy and hypocrisy were real instruments to exploit the Untouchables - As in this incident priest (Brahmin), the so-called custodian of religion is on one hand ready to have physical relation with a beautiful Untouchable girl, Sohini, and on the other hand Bakha, Sohini’s brother is not allowed even to touch the steps of the temple. Anand tries to reveal such religious bigotry in this novel Untouchable.
Through Bakha’s character, Anand wants to develop a kind of awareness in the conscience of outcaste and exploited people. Bakha just cannot understand why he should be regarded socially inferior while he used to think that he was superior to his fellow outcastes. This feeling of superiority was an essential feature of his personality, as this feeling alone could give him identity in a society that treated him as outcaste, as faceless creatures of dirt. Anand analyses the deep-seated maladies afflicting society and reveals his insight into the roots of suffering. He concretizes his perception of the human predicament in his age.

Bakha’s association with British soldiers has awakened him to a consciousness of new realities. In his life of eighteen years he has been treated like a human being only by them. In a reference to the novel, V.G. Kirnan says that the Tommies “were in a rough way much friendlier (to Bakha) than his own highcaste countrymen” (Kiernan 59). This has given Bakha an awareness of his individuality and he naturally strives to assert himself; and is thus different from his fellow castemen. Though not metamorphosed altogether, still abject, too ready to gravel, he can think condition and an awakened consciousness gives rise to the ‘action’ of the novel. Anand commiserates with him in his sufferings but is happy to find that Bakha can think and question, and this predicates the possibility of a change. This change has been taking place on different levels in society and even Bakha has sensation of it, though he is little aware that he is both the object and the instrument of his process of change.

While Bakha’s awareness of this process of change is primitive, a sophisticated consciousness of it has gone into the making of the novel. Anand’s achievement lies in the fact that sophisticated consciousness has generally been kept out of the novel. It
comes from the effort of creating something primitive from a sophisticated stance. The novel indeed cannot be arbitrarily brushed aside as a propaganda piece. The distinction between a tract and a novel has to be kept in mind. This is not a pamphlet on the irrationality of untouchability. It does not attack, in Journalistic rhetoric, the capricious and heinous attitude of the caste Hindus, nor does it appeal to them in impassioned terms to wash away and expiate for their age old misdeeds. *Untouchable* is a novel and is the result of an artistic synthesis of Anand’s experience of and his insight into the flux of Indian consciousness. If this results in an attack on social norms and behaviour, it is no slur on Anand’s artistic integrity but shows that his grasp of the problem is genuine and his involvement is deep. Moreover, this is not an attack from the outside but arises from the subject itself and accentuates the note of social change, which is a part of Anand’s artistic vision. Bakha’s experiences in the course of a day are carefully delineated individually and in their totality they give to the novel an intensity which is harsh but for more satisfying than the discussion of “India” as an abstract concept.

Objectivity is vitally important in a novel of protest, because without it, the work is in danger of becoming more protest than novel. Anand seems to be fully aware of this, and avoids the temptation to make Bakha’s entire day a chronicle of misery. Bakha is of course humiliated, cursed and bullied in turn, and above all, has to suffer the mortification of finding his sister being molested by the lascivious temple priest. But the day does provide few sunny moments also. After a termagant of a woman has scolded and driven him away from the wooden platform outside her house on which he rests for a moment, a kindly woman consoles him by handling over a chapatti to him, with the gentle admonition, ‘My child, you shouldn’t sit on peoples’ door-steps like this.
Similarly, Havildar Charat Singh, who seems to be above all caste prejudices, actually asks him to go into his kitchen and bring him own tumbler into the pan in Bakha’s hand. And the day brings Bakha two great gifts: a brand-new hockey-stick, a present from the generous Havildar Charat Singh, and secondly, a gift far more precious the gift of hope, that some day he will be set free from his dirty duty of latrine-cleaning imposed on him by the accident of his birth as an untouchable.

The same kind of objectivity is discernible in the portrayal of character also. The obvious temptation in a novel of protest is to divide characters neatly into the sheep and the goats. Anand withstands the temptation very well. The Untouchables in the novel are not all angels, nor are the caste Hindus all devils. It is made clear that Bakha is not a run of the mill Untouchable. He looks intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who is as a rule, uncouth and unclean.

Once in his childhood Bakha fell seriously ill. Lakha his father, rushed to Hakeem Ji to save his son’s life. But being an untouchable he had to maintain a distance. But at last the Hakeem was moved after a number of requests gave treatment to Bakha and with great difficulty he was saved. Lakha fell on doctor’s feet and begged him to save the life of his son. The doctor felt that he was defiled and shouted at him as Chandal and abused him. When Bakha heard this his blood was boiled. He told his son that “It is religion which prevents them from touching us” (Untouchable 74).

Seeing a boy injured in a hockey game, Bakha brings him to his house. Instead of praising and appreciating his efforts to assist an injured boy, Bakha is not only assaulted and debarred but is also charged with defiling the injured boy. The height of insult that
the members of this community have to face can be judged by the following comment.

“Oh you eater of your masters! You have killed my son’ she wailed flinging her hands across her breasts and turning blue and red with fear. ‘Give him to me’. Give me child! You have defiled my house besides wounding my son!” (Untouchable 106).

These are the comments that Bakha has to listen quite often and continue to clean the road and the toilets. His fate is inescapable. The height of social alienation of this class can be understood by the fact that these people have to announce their arrival whenever they appear in thoroughfares. Bakha as an untouchable seeks his freedom in the infallibility of caste discrimination, with its hypocrisy, cruelty, deceit and inhumanity. He stands passive and bewildered at the immensity of horror hoping for a change. Bakha, thus, is a symbolic figure, a universal figure, which stands for a large segment of Indian Society which had been doomed to suffering since times immemorial. To stress the universal nature of his theme, the novelist has called it Untouchable and not the Untouchable. It is story not of Bakha’s suffering alone but of sufferings of all untouchables as a class.

Anand, on the threshold of a literary career, makes an effective protest against the stigma of pollution attached to untouchables. M.K. Naik says: “He exhibits a sure grasp of the psychology of both the caste Hindus and Untouchable [...] . His picture of relationship between them is objective and balanced” (Naik 29).

Thus in Untouchable, Anand is deeply concerned with a social problem of national dimension and he takes up the role of a writer committed to eradication of the evils of society. As Srinivasa Iyengar points:
The novel presents the picture of a place of a society, and of certain persons, nor is easily to be forgotten picture that also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy (Iyengar 264).

The novel remains a telling document of relevance even today in view of recent atrocities being committed on “Dalits” by caste Hindus. Untouchability, the social evil, is shown with its deep roots. In other words, it reflects the deep-rooted prejudices, the barbarism and the cruelty with which men inflict human beings who are still non-entities in the eyes of society. Anand has attempted a fictional depiction of heartfelt experiences of this dehumanizing social evil, which results in loneliness, loss of identity and rootlessness. Anand himself says:

The book poured out like hot lava from the Volcano of my crazed imagination during a long weekend. I remember that I had to finger. Exercise in order to ease the strain on my right hand. And I must have slept only Six hours in three nights, while writing this drama, and even during the six hours. I kept on dreaming about several strains in the central character of Bakha, almost as though I was moulding his personality and transmulating it from actuality into the hero of a Nightmare (Anand 29).

*The Road* is a short novel, which at once reminds us of Anand’s other novel, *Untouchable*. Anand’s emotional involvement with the problem of Untouchability is evident from the fact that he returned to the theme twenty six years later in *The Road*. Handling the theme of untouchability some twenty six years later Anand had to face a
challenge. After independence, untouchability was officially abolished but interior parts of the country still followed the same system and it has changed its forms. In a letter to Cowasjee Anand explains:

Well, it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, twenty miles from Delhi, in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru to find that the out castes, not only in South-India, but in the mixed north, were still consigned 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 (Anand 124).

*The Road* is a novel which works out its progress on the basis of a symbol. The symbol is the road: the road to progress, the road out of hell, the road built and evolved by the sufferers themselves. Bhikhu stretches out to his full height as the landlord’s son cowers back: “Then he felt he must withdraw before either hand should strike” (Shivpuri 203). Eliot, not a radical writer in any sense, has this to say about commonsense: “The function of humanism is not to provide dogmas of philosophical theories… it is concerned less with ‘reason’ than ‘commonsense’. “It is the commonsense and sanity of Bhikhu which makes him realise that the dignity of Bhikhu reduces his opponents into contemptible worms. He walks away as a king walks away from his kingdom, but he walks away to fresh fields and pastures new, for he is sure of hand and confident in the
heart. He is a man who has seen the dawn from the top of the mountain while the jackals he leaves behind are still in the darkness of the valley of habitual custom. This is the great victory of the novelist that he transforms a failure into a victory. This is also his humanism. Again to remember what Eliot said, “Humanism makes for breadth, tolerance, equilibrium and sanity, it operates against fanaticism” (Cape 54).

When the Dalits build a road to carry milk from the village to the town, Bhikhu does not understand the anger of the high-caste Hindus. ‘They had never allowed him to walk on the village earth even if he could never go into the temple.’ His soul is unsubdued. Fascinated by landlord Thakur Singh’s daughter Rukmani, he knows he will have to suffer if the half-conscious affection of his love of her were even to flow over the reins of his eyes. ‘And yet at the ultimate point of excitement in him he asked: ‘Why not?’’ Pandit Suraj Mani, the representative of a cruel religion, is comic like all such characters in Anand. If the rich are cruel, the priests have always provoked them to be more cruel. But even Suraj Mani is depicted with tolerance. He can enjoy the sensuous joys of nature in spite of his crude sensual nature. “The alacrity of his gait betokened urgency, and he hurried on his naked nimble feet, feeling the goodness of the dew on the little tufts of grass against the soles of his feet” (The Road 12). His desire to be seen naked by the village women after he finished his bath epitomizes in a single situation the entire exhibition of his character. He does not want to wash his hands after toilet with the earth touched by the untouchables. But he is timid at heart like a “lizard frightened of its own shadow” (The Road 14).

*The Road* is a rehash of *Untouchable*. The government hires Bhikhu and the other Untouchables to build a road so that milk can be easily transported from the village of
Govardhan to the city. The road would mean prosperity. For the village, but the construction is opposed by the caste Hindus who refuse even to touch the stones quarried by the Untouchables. There are two opposing factions: one led by Lambardar Dhooli singh who, though a caste Hindu himself has aligned himself with the Untouchables; the other led by sarpanch Thakur singh-the landlord, who owns most of the village and the land on which the untouchables live. As the feud continues, Thakur Singh’s son, Sajnu, along with Dhooli Singh’s son, Lachman, burns down the huts of the untouchables, who now find shelter in the Lambardar’s house. Lachman repents his arson and goes to work with the others to build the road. Sajnu, after a brief period of repentance, rejoins his father’s crusade against the untouchables.

Like Untouchable, in The Road Anand deals with the same problem of untouchability 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 on a symbolical reading, the novel is a crusade against the inequality and inhumanity practised against a subaltern untouchables- the triumph of good over evil. In this novel, as in untouchable, casteism is practised and condemned because it disgraces human dignity. The story revolves round the subaltern Bhikhu, the leader of the untouchables of a village, condemned to build a link road.

The Road, instead of becoming a way to enlightenment is converted into a place of human degradation a shattering place of social reformers’ dreams. Dhooli Singh, though a Kshatriya, calls it a breach in the order of Karma. Inspired by the ideals of social reformers, he decides to help the subalterns as his wife deserts him and caste
Hindus brand mark him to the rank of the untouchables, since his conduct is a violation of caste—based hierarchical gradation.

Anand excels in laying bare before us the acute mental agony and utter despair of Bhikhu in the scene where, inspired and enthused by Government’s decision of abolition of untouchability, he asks for water at the house of Thakur Singh, a Kshatriya, but is furiously insulted and turned out by the latter: “He went in the direction of the road, he had helped to build; and in his soul, he took the direction out the village towards Delhi town, capital of Hindustan, where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste” (The Road 96). In The Road Anand portrays not only the sufferings and agony of the Bhikhu but also an attempt to project the magnanimous caste Hindus in order to awaken, the world over, the conscience of the members of their community against the miserable and inhuman treatment which the subalterns, in society are subjected to. Both Untouchable and The Road portray, in surrealistic terms, the anguish and suffering of subalterns, ‘Dalits’, who continue to be the victims of ‘Othering’ and are forced to stand on the periphery by those in the ‘centre’

Anand wants to show that even after Independence and political autonomy things have not changed. One third of Indian citizens, namely Dalits, still remain enslaved in India. Anand feels the need to hammer on the point again as he himself was a witness to the discriminations and humiliation to which Dalits were subjected to in the villages. Bhikhu is the new avatar of the Bakha. He is literate but the society has not changed and there is no effort to provide dignity to this caste. The Road reaffirms Anand’s firm faith in the essential dignity of man, whatever his caste and position may be in society. The
novel shows that the caste-consciousness of the orthodox Hindus is the chief cause of various obstacles in the path of the poor outcastes of the village.

Anand’s heroes arouse pity, compassion and understanding in the end. Herein lies the catharsis of Anand’s art. To Anand, it must be underlined, a human being is a human being and not just a thing. Naturally, he upholds the dignity of man-man who is the supreme being on earth, full of goodness and potential. Hence, man is to be respected, not to be degraded. However, Anand idealises the whole man, as he had said that his media as a writer were “the memory and imagination” and the substance of his work became “the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationship, rather one single part of it”. Anand has caught public imagination as a crusader against all such human systems which heap indignities on man and deprive him of his organic growth to happiness, for Anand believes in mankind’s ability to achieve happiness and fulfillment without the need of religion. In other words, Anand regards man as the prime object of study, not God or nature, and believes that suffering and pain, the inevitable conditions of human existence, can be controlled and mitigated by man through the application of imagination, science and reason together with love, compassion and equality. Hence, man alone can fashion forth is happy world free from superstition, bigotry, caste, class, capitalism, exploitation, tyranny, fascism, war, genocide etc. which make mankind miserable. This will help man to acquire a true vision for rescuing humanity from disaster. Anand’s sole aim is to give human beings a much better treatment hitherto given to them.

If Anand’s novels, particularly Untouchable and The Road are perused, keeping the above background in mind, one wouldn’t fail to note two fundamental points raised by Anand in exposing the Hindu obscurantist ideology of casteism in India. One, the
principle of Karma has been the main cause of overwhelming self-pity among the lowcastes about their poor lot. They have inherited the spirit of resignation down through their countless ancestors. Also, the same belief has armed the twice-born castes with cruelty, aggressiveness and they have, therefore, used it to stifle every voice of protest of low-ones emanating wrong-doers. Secondly, with heredity determining occupations, the low castes have no option but must solely depend upon the low jobs, thus being excluded from sharing power in power structure. In this respect Anand comes close to Dickens who… “locates the problem not simply in individuals, who are corrupt or irresponsible or self seeking but in certain structures, ways of thinking, and modes of action which are themselves anti-human” (Eagleton 41). Again, Anand, like Dickens, who dwells in detail on London slums, unsparingly exposes the outcastes’ terrible and shocking living conditions in Untouchable. Dickens’s experiences of poverty and suffering were direct as he, at the tender age of ten, had to work at Warrens factory in London. Anand had seen the Indian underdogs suffer at close quarter in his early years spent in outcastes’ lane in the British Cantonment in India. Their sufferings left such impact on his young sensibility that he had determined to work for them all his life. Anand voices his resolve in Morning Face:

I could sense that though I had grown up to be unconventional and accepted the low caste and outcaste people as my equals, our elders still kept the Untouchable at a distance for the fear of pollution of their person and spoliation of their status. The anger against the snobbery of the twice-born in despising the good Bakha had already gone deep into my elusive spirit and got buried in my being as a kind of resentment against all those
who stop the human flow, erupting at any manifestation of the old Hindu prejudice. At any rate, I vowed in myself, never to accept in my life, and go wherever the slaves were cleaning, washing and scrubbing, to become poor for Bakha’s sake, to mix with the perfumes with bad smells, melt all my senses into diffused personality (Anand 325).

In fact, by projecting the social oppression, moral degradation and economic agonies of the outcastes in his creative writings, Anand has advanced their cause. How close Anand is to the outcastes in artistically rendering their suffering is indicative by the fact his friends of childhood Bakha, the sweeper’s son, Ram Charan, the washerman’s son and Chota, the leather worker’s son, figure in his first novel Untouchable. By selecting Bakha as a protagonist of Untouchable Anand articulated to the international audience the voice of dumb millions who had never before figured in the world of Indian writing in English.

As a stark realist like Prem Chand and Dickens, Anand unravels how the low-castes’ thousands of years of slavish existence has accounted for ingraining a sense of inferiority in them. The feeling that their birth among outcastes is the result of the sins of past life; a belief enunciated, propagated and forced by the high castes on the low ones has caused so debilitating sense that they have always meekly resigned to the authority of the caste Hindus, quietly groaning under the heavy weight of conventions, holding their actions of the previous birth responsible to be born in low castes. Bakha’s father Lakha in Untouchable and Bhikhu’s mother, Laxmi in The Road represent the fatalist outlook, common to low caste persons of old generation. Their notion of inherent weakness of outcastes, which is deep-rooted in their being, has emanated from their unquestioned
respect to the stringent laws of caste order as well as their belief in the law of Karma. They show much adherence to caste order that they look upon the caste Hindu as the very embodiment of goodness, irrespective of how cruelly they deal with the former. Lakha remains unruffled when Bakha complains against the ill-treatment he received at the hands of the high caste Hindus. Even the unfortunate incident involving Sohini’s molestation by the priest Kalinath does barely rouse him to anger. The belief in inferiority of outcasts and that of superiority of high castes forms integral part of his existence. In this respect he is very close to PremChand’s Hori in Godan. As Hori tries to convince his son Gobar of the superiority of the rich. So does Lakha try to convince Bakha of the highness of the caste Hindus. Hence he does not approve of retaliatory posture of his son against the caste Hindus. Just as the observance of community mores is a sacred act for Hori. So is obedience to caste rules really a matter of pride for him. Lakha proudly tells Bakha: “They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us” (Untouchable 71).

Aristotle’s famous dictum that ‘character is the resultant of man’s habitual actions’ is true in Lakha’s case. The oppressive caste system, which has been sanctioned by Hinduism, has so much dehumanised him that submission to its rules has got embedded in his psyche. So much so, that he sees no wrong even in brutalities committed by the caste Hindus on his own wards. Unable to grasp the forces behind the operation of caste rules, he upholds the sanctity of caste order. He naively persuades his son not to hold the caste Hindus responsible for ill-treatment but to blame their religion.

Anand himself comments on fatalist outlook of Lakha after he tells his son a story of how he himself suffered indignity at the hands of the Hakim (medicine man). “He had
never throughout his narrative renounced his deep-rooted sense of inferiority and the
docile acceptance of the laws of fate” (Untouchable 74). Similarly, Laxmi, mother of
Bhikhu in The Road shares Lakha’s obscurantist belief in sanctity of caste order. Like
Lakha, who depresses the retaliatory spirit of his son, Laxmi also wishes her son Bhikhu
could internalise the caste rules in his person. Believing the caste order to be a divine
dispensation, she feels that every member of the low castes is working out the
consequences of his misdeeds of the previous birth or births. The religious merit,
accruing from obedience to laws of caste, Laxmi firmly believes, would liberate the
outcastes from such sins. She, like Lakha, persuades her son to give up the attitude of
defiance towards the caste Hindus and earn religious merit by abiding by their will. See
how naively she, like Lakha, tries to convince her son of the efficacy of caste system:
“Then through our good deeds shall we rise from our low castes and be born into high
caste” (The Road 4).

In The Road, Suraj Mani, the priest at the temple in Govardhan village, exploits
the myth of law of Karma to satisfy his priestly greed. He combines with Thakur Singh,
the landlord, in inciting the Kshatriya caste against the Dalits over the issue of building
the village road. He propagates the orthodox Hindu view-point among the villagers that
the Untouchables by handling the stone for constructing have polluted the thorough-fare.
Since it is a sinful act, it would result in evil spreading in the world. True to the style of
priests who have concocted bizarre myths even about secular institutions, Suraj Mani
exploits the myth of Karma even in the nineteen sixties: “And people suffer enough for
the guilt’s of the past. To be sure, they ought to suffer before they can rise to a higher
caste in the next life or recognise the divine. The temple teaches them Dharma” (The Road 37).

Through Pundit Suraj Mani, as through Pundit Kalinath in Untouchable, Anand exposes the greed of the priestly class. In order to satisfy his greed of receiving offerings he tries to convince Thakur Singh that purificatory ceremony will undo the defilement caused by the touch of the Untouchables while handling the stone. He further appeases the landlord by telling him that the Untouchables are poor because of their sins rather than because of their exploitation by him. His own words reveal how behind the facade of purificatory ceremony his greed operates:

Those people are condemned by their Karma to work out their doom among the flies and the dust of their huts. The reek of their thatched roofs and the stifling heat is punishment enough for them... And, our people were wrong in openly refusing to break the stones touched by the Harijans. It is easier for you to flee out of fire than for them to escape from their past deeds. Always they will remain tainted by their past deeds, but you are twice born... Now, a purificatory ceremony is necessary. And the shadow of the evil stars that is on your family can only be cured by a special puja . . . (The Road 36).

In exposing Suraj Mani’s greed for offerings, false religiosity and sexual lust, Anand attacks the priestly class as he does in the case of Kalinath, the priest in Untouchable. In the example of Suraj Mani, he shows that the priests were not only interpreters of social codes, but they wielded considerable influence in village affairs.
However, neither Bakha nor Bhikhu looks upon the caste codes as divinely ordained. In creating Bhikhu, Anand did not add any new trait to the hero; hence he remains another version of Bakha. Yet Bhikhu, a product of the 1960s as he is more vehement in opposing the tyranny of high castes. However, both show, strong aversion to follow the hereditary occupations; Bakha of scavenging and Bhikhu of shoe making.

Since *Untouchable* was written in the 1930s, Bakha feels more constrained to follow the dreary routine work of cleaning dirt than Bhikhu feels. Through Bakha’s protest against his inhuman treatment by a caste Hindu, in contrast to the abject resignation of his father to their will, Anand underlines the fact how the young generations of the 1930s aspired for a change in water-tight compartment system of caste. Bakha, who is representative of the outcastes, registers strong protest with his father, against his own maltreatment and molestation of Sohini, his sister. Unlike his father, who has unflinching faith in goodness of caste system, Bakha voices hatred for, and anger against, the unjust which has doomed him to a life verging on slavery. Hence such irrational ideas that performance of caste-duties will qualify him to be born in a family a caste Hindu never trouble him. On the contrary, he shows enough determination to retaliate against the caste Hindu who slaps him when he inadvertently happens to touch him. Bakha’s anger is discernible in these words of Anand: The cumulated strength of his giant body glistened in him with the desire for revenge, while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame. In a moment he had lost all his humility, and he would have lost his temper too, but the man who had struck him the blow had stepped beyond reach into the street (*Untouchable* 42).
Bakha’s resentment against the insulting behaviour of the caste Hindus is not an explosion of anger but he thinks to retaliate against the caste Hindus coolly. He, however, fails to overstep the barriers built up by caste conventions to protect the high castes, particularly priestly class, against the outcastes. The Hindu law code lies down that a low caste person should not hit the priestly class. He, however, flies into rage when he comes to know of Sohini’s molestation: “His eyes flared wild and his teeth ground between them the challenge: I could show you what that Brahmin dog has done (Untouchable 54).

So indignant does Bakha feel against the priest in general and the crowd of the caste Hindu in particular that “he could kill them all. He looked ruthless deadly, pale and livid with anger and rage”. (Untouchable 54) The insult of Sohini rankles in his mind when Bakha is on his way to collect food from the houses of caste Hindus. He reiterates his protest while pondering over her insult: “My poor sister; How can she show her face to the world after this? But why didn’t she let me go and kill that man? Why was she born a girl in our house, to bring disgrace upon us?” (Untouchable 56).

In the failure of Bakha to retaliate against his tormentors, despite his burning rage to do so, Anand focuses on three forces: heredity, environment and unjust social order. Bakha, notwithstanding that he has done with dreary and monotonous job of cleaning the latrines, must suffer at the hands of upper caste because he has no other means to earn his bread and butter, except one, that is to say, hereditary work of scavenging. He has been following the hereditary function as “he had begun to work at the latrines at the age of six and resigned himself to the hereditary life of the craft, but he dreamed of becoming a Sahib” (Untouchable 31).
The social environment which is callous towards an untouchable has so much morally degraded him that he always suffers from a debilitating sense of inferiority. Anand drives home this fact when Bakha is promised a hockey stick by Charat Singh:

Charat Singh’s generous promise had called forth that trait of servility in Bakha which he had inherited from his fore-fathers: the weakness of the downtrodden, the helplessness of the poor and the indigent suddenly receiving help, the passive contentment of fulfillment of a secret and long cherished desire (Untouchable 9).

Of all, however, the social order is the most hardened culprit for the pathetic life and mental torture of Bakha. He has to repress the natural instincts of indignation when he is physically tormented and mentally tortured. He cannot even run away to escape from the torments of the caste Hindu whom he happens to touch. Anand pathetically reveals the helplessness of his protagonist caught in a crisis of social values: But then he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one (Untouchable 39).

Anand further attacks the contradictions inherent in caste system in that Bakha is doomed to suffer the lot of an Untouchable, not that he is not fit to be assigned any other duty than that of a sweeper, but the social system is based on inequality. Notwithstanding that he possesses mental faculty and physical strength to any job; he does not get what deserves. Anand is impressed by dexterous skill with which he handled even the dirty job:
And though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean. He did not even soil his sleeves handling the commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them. ‘A bit’ superior to his job, one would have said, not the kind of man who ought to be doing. For he looked intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger who is as a rule uncouth and unclean (*Untouchable* 8).

Anand also portrays the personality of Bakha:

> The toil of the body had built up for him a very fine physique. It seemed to suit him, to give homogeneity, a wonderful wholeness to his body. And it gave him nobility, strangely in contrast with this filthy profession and of the sub-human status to which he was born (*Untouchable* 12).

Bakha is not only a superb example in the hefty and strong frame, but he has the highest sense of duty. He never shirks work. He performs duty with a sense of worship. Anand writes “Bakha had principles. With him duty came first, although he was a champion at all kinds of games and would have beaten them hollow at Khuti. He seemed intent, on his work and he was going to move on” (*Untouchable* 29).

Viewed in the above background, Anand’s protest against the discriminatory caste order seems righteous. His protest mainly emanates from how the caste system, which is hallowed by tradition and sanctified by Hindu religion, has economically exploited, socially oppressed and politically, alienated a large segment of neglected mankind called the outcastes. Bakha is the classic example of deprived humanity. The case of Bakha according to Anand, is of clash between person and circumstance: “He could not reach
out from the narrow confines of his soul to his yearnings. It was a discord between person and circumstances by which a lion like him lay enmeshed in a net while many a common criminal wore rajah’s crown” (Untouchable).

Like Bakha, Bhikhu, in The Road, suffers because of unjust social order. Like Bakha, he is both sturdy in body and a bard. Not unlike Bakha he possesses quick intelligence. He, however, is more daring and radical in thinking than Bakha because Bakha represents the agonies, frustrations, and the resultant resentment of outcastes of the 1930s, Bhikhu voices their protest against their oppression in the post-Independence India, that is to say, the 1960s. He does not believe that good actions by outcastes will undo the bad deeds of the previous births. Whereas his mother, Laxmi, since she is orthodox, believes that the outcastes will rise from their low status through good deeds. Bhikhu protests against the principle of rebirth: “I will see you to the door of the temple, but don’t talk of good and bad deeds... We have done plenty of good deeds in our life, but no merit has accrued” (The Road 4).

In negating the obscurantist theory of caste, he is more radical and vocal than Bakha, who fails to rise to occasion to take revenge upon the high caste Bhikhu shows great deal of vehemence in the fight against the boys of upper castes. He vehemently voices his anger against the belief declaring that mere touch or contact of an outcaste result in temple getting polluted. He reasonably declares: “One is a leather worker by profession and not by birth” (The Road 6).

In The Road Anand brings home the fact that social distinctions—both economic and caste based—which were the order of day in the pre-Independence India, continued to
prevail after Independence, Thakur Singh, who belongs to the caste of Kshatriya is not only the headman (Sarpanch) of the village, but also owns hundred bigha land. He thus is both the moral and material prop in society. If power corrupts, the concentration of material and social power in him has corrupted him absolutely. His own son, Sajnu indulges in arson by setting afire the thatched huts of the outcasts. Anand puts the glaring injustice in mouth of his protagonist: “Their fault may pass ‘said Bhikhu’, ours seem hereditary” (The Road 50).

Anand wrote The Road out of hatred of caste system, since no improvement occurred in the condition of Dalits after attainment of political Independence in 1947. Hence Anand addresses himself to the same basic problem of inequality in Indian society. As Bakha is helpless to opt for any occupation than that of a sweeper; the outcaste and Bhikhu... “Cured the skins of dead animals and twinned the rope and some of these were perhaps even sweepers” (The Road 16).

In the pre-Independence India the outcasts were... “Sunk in ignorance. All public wells, temples, road, school sanatorium”, (The Road) were not accessible to them. They were socially oppressed and beaten up. After Independence, though we adopted democratic system of government, with a written constitution guaranteeing to all “access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and place of public entertainment or the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state’s fund or dedicated to the use of general public” (Shukla 43). Despite the law having existed for abolition of untouchability, the outcasts, as Anand realistically underlines, even six decades after Independence continued to be socially oppressed by denying them access to public convenience like road and wells. “And they continue to be oppressed
even today six decades after the enactment of the law. Towards the end of the 1991 alone the tragedy which claimed the lives of 21 Dalits in Andhra Pradesh is the case in the point” (Gautam 4).

As a political novelist, Anand ‘in The Road underlines the plight of the Dalits by raising the basic question: does not the burning down of the low castes’ huts by Sajnu, the landlord’s son, make mockery of hallowed declaration enshrined in our constitution? Anand himself seems to answer that the problem of ending oppression on weaker sections cannot be viewed from sociological angle. Nor can it be put to an end by legislation. On the contrary, it is deeply rooted in the remnants of feudalism still existing in our country. Owing to land being owned by powerful sections hailing from high castes, the majority of low caste people work as landless labourers. For want of means of livelihood, they, like other masses of downtrodden classes, fail to oppose their economic exploitation and social oppression and suffer from disabilities in the use of public convenience.

Appalled at their economic plight, Anand raises the fundamental question: why do a handful of people get plenty to roll in and why do the millions live on the verge of starvation? To quote his own words from his novel The Road; “Many of these Chamars do not have bread with pickle twice a day” (The Road 23). And Again: “God must come down incarnate as bread in our country” (The Road 51).

The underdogs in the Indian society are not only dependent on the rich for bread but also for shelter. They live in thatched huts erected on the land of the landlord. Hence they cannot defy the will of their master, lest he should get the land evacuated from them.
However, when they go ahead with the work of building the road, their prognostication comes true, as they face the threat from the landlord’s son, Sajnu. “Both Lachman and I can go and ask their families to leave since the land on these huts stand belongs to both our houses” (The Road 39). In view of above vulnerable conditions of the bottom dogs in India they suffer from disabilities as before. In the 1930s Bakha suffers from social ostracism. He cannot enter in the premises of a temple because he “realised that an Untouchable going into a temple polluted it past purification” (Untouchable 49).

The untouchables have no access to public wells as “the outcasts were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were even to draw water from it, the Hindus of three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream” (Untouchable 14).

Bhikhu also continues to suffer from the above disabilities. Some of them continue to exist even today. The ban on entry of Dalits in Nathdwara temple in Rajasthan in 1988 is too well known. In The Road, neither Bhikhu nor his mother is allowed into temple. Bhikhu, unlike Bakha, does not meekly submit before the power of Sajnu and other boys of high caste.

He forcibly attempts to enter the temple. But he has to retreat his way when he is assaulted by the boys of high caste. Nor is Bhikhu allowed to enter the temple school. So Bhikhu learns to read and write from a fellow untouchable, Danda Rain. Similarly, the caste Hindus also vehemently oppose building of the village road because of two reasons. One, the orthodox priest, Suraj Mani and the landlord Thakur Singh believe that handling
of stone by the outcastes has defiled the way and therefore they have contaminated the 
religion of caste Hindus. Secondly, and what is more important, the landlord opposes the 
construction of the road as the Untouchables have been given work on government 
contract. He does not want them to earn wages as they would become economically free 
from his economic hegemony. The outcaste labourers have hitherto worked in the fields 
of the landlord and have, therefore, remained economically dependent upon him. The 
point is well made by’ philanthropist Dhooli Singh: “They wanted to build it also, but 
they do not want you to work and earn money and all other things are lies” (The Road 50).

Besides, Anand unmistakably brings out the fact that the few individuals of caste 
Hindus, who were landlords prior to Independence, continued to own land after 
Independence. Owing to uneven distribution of land and want of gainful employment, the 
means of the living of the outcastes are precarious. Dhooli Singh brings out this fact 
while advocating their cause to Thakur Singh: “But these Chamars think differently with 
no land and work for only four months of the year” (The Road 23).

Notwithstanding opposition by the landlord and his son, Bhikhu, the protagonist, 
and his other comrades of low castes, succeed in building the road. However, the ending 
of the novel does not elevate the reader. Towards the end of the novel, Bhikhu goes to the 
mansion of the landlord where the landlord’s son beats him and reminds him of his 
belonging to Chamars community. As a sequel to it Bhikhu takes the road to Delhi, 
“where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste” (The 
Road 96).
In showing Bhikhu’s taking road to Delhi Anand seems to suggest that Bhikhu may not suffer the caste oppression in an urban centre like Delhi. But the question arises: how will the outcastes move to cities from villages in order to free themselves from the ‘caste oppression?

Apart from the disappointing ending of *The Road*, Anand overlooked some thematic facts. In spite of the fact that Public Works Department has been beset with corruption, Anand has not exposed the corrupt practices either of Diwan Roop Krishan, The B.D.O., or of Tulsi Das, the Engineer. Nor does he expose the hollowness of political promises made for protecting the weaker sections during the elections by the Congress under the leadership of Nehru. On the other hand, Anand exudes a lot of optimism that the Government would be able to instil confidence among the tottering outcastes and would thus enable them to stand on their own. Anand’s faith in the policies of the Congress Government may be seen in Dhooli Singh’s comments after the huts of the Dalits are burnt down by the landlord’s son: “And tomorrow I will go to Gurgaon and get enough money from the Sarkar for building huts there” (*The Road* 46).

*Untouchable* and *The Road* illustrate Anand’s state of mind against the malady of caste. He makes a scathing attack against the touch-me-not attitude of Caste Hindus that promotes a fiendish segregation of humanity advantage to some and injustice too many, and he rejects it outright, to Anand’s perception of the reality gives also a glimpse of the connivance of colluding forces which cumulatively oppress the poor and the helpless. Greed and lust are added accessories. The reader can notice how wicked and worldly-minded most of the religious priests are. And they join hands with the oppressors and exploiters. In Anand’s view, they stand for what swami Vivekananda calls, “priest craft”
and black marketing of religion which is the bane of India. Pandit Kalinath of *Untouchable* is a first class hypocrite. He is in no way different from the high caste Hindus in oppressing the Untouchables. He is particular that the low caste women should not come close to well lest they should pollute the well-water but does not mind trying to seduce Sohini, a sweeper girl. Pandit Suraj Mani of *The Road* moves about carrying with him a little earth to avoid pollution but yet gladly accepts the mangoes plucked by the Untouchables.

Social exploitation co-exists along with religious conservatism. For instance, in *Untouchable*, after accidental touch, Lalaji feels defiled and desires “to take a bath to purify” himself. The devotees find fault with Bakha for having climbed, “the steps of the temple. No wonder, then Prof. Varma in the *Sword and the Sickle* is of the opinion that religious rituals are Brahmin tricks to keep people where they are and to coin money through conducting ceremonials”.

Like Maxim Gorky, Anand has the ability to see human qualities in the poor and the underprivileged of Indian society. As the reader is given to understand that the world is full of cruelty, exploitation and oppression against the poor and the innocent, he is also made to witness the world of love, natural affection, human comradeship, brotherhood, togetherness and solidarity experienced by the poor among themselves. This world of love is juxtaposed and contrasted with that of inhuman oppression. Anand shows that what the world of inhumanity denies, negates and repudiates is affirmed, strengthened and idealized as a life-sustaining value. In terms of human values, the essence of which is humanness and tenderness, Anand shows that the poor have what the rich do not, and
they have them in spite of the innumerable hardships and humiliating experiences they endure thanks to the wicked and crooked ways of the rich and the powerful.

This merciless attitude of the upper castes against the sweepers leads us to think that, had the air the sweepers breathe been in control of the people belonging to the upper castes, they would have withheld the supply of it. Wherever Bakha goes he meets with humiliation and hears words like ‘polluted’ and ‘defiled’. Sometimes he thinks, ‘What I have done to deserve all this’? *Untouchable* closes on a note of faith and idealism. As Bakha returns home his mind is raised with the hope that soon the age of flush system will come when “the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society” (*Untouchable* 146).

The main aim, purpose and theme, which Anand wants to illustrate through the treatment of exploitation in *Untouchable*, is also implied in the novel that the ultimate solution lies with the man, who is the master of his destiny. Bakha is a perfect individual whose excellence is flowed by his low caste for which he is definitely not responsible. But his becomes a serious shortcoming and is the root cause of humiliation and ill-treatment suffered by him at the hands of caste Hindus. Thus, Anand seems to be suggesting that man’s fate in the contemporary world is controlled and shaped by society and men rather than by god.

With a penetrating insight into untouchability and a touching, presentation of its various facets, Anand has carved out for himself a niche in the temple of fame. Anand’s treatment of Untouchability explores some fine moral and realistic aspects of human life.
Anand makes use of art for the sake of man. Caste and national barriers have no significance for him, and he regards all mankind as one, and his purpose is to focus attention on the plight of the have-nots, arouse sympathy for them, and thus pave the way of their betterment.

A close reading of *Untouchable* highlights Anand’s belief, that man is the highest reality in this world. Man has in him enough creative energy and imagination to transform himself and raise himself to glorious pinnacles of dignity and to rid mankind of its unspeakable misery and pain, all through his tireless physical and mental energy. Anand fervently pleads for the emergence of a new conception of the role of man in this vast universe. Anand seems to be suggesting that the most vital need of our troubled times is to engender among men a genuine respect for man, love for him, and faith in his ability to live a life that lies in man’s constant attempts to rise from lower passion to height of splendour.

Towards the end of the novel *Untouchable*, Anand has suggested three possible solutions to the problem of untouchability. First of all Anand presents Colonel Hutchinson, who is always in search of the troubled outcastes, to prepare them to change religion from Hinduism to Christianity. Bakha is not satisfied with his preaching, as he is not able to understand who Christ was and why he sacrificed his life, and on the contrary, he feels that Hutchinson wants to convert him to his religion. The missionary fails to convince Bakha to change his religion and to make him Christian. Hence, this solution Anand demonstrates, cannot resolve and to make him Christian. Hence, this solution Anand demonstrates, cannot resolve Bakha’s problem.
The other two solutions brought up in the novel are to be found in the speech of Mahatma Gandhi delivered at Gol Bagh and the harangue of poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar. Mahatma wants to share the sufferings and sorrows of untouchables. But at last, he condemns untouchables for their bad habits. Bakha does not like this because he feels that they are being blamed by Mahatma for their misdeeds and bad habits. But despite Bakha’s sincere enthusiasm for the pious sentiments of the Mahatma in terms of practicality, it is less satisfying than even muddled-offerings of the missionary. Bakha feels in this solution, he has only a nominal part to play in his own release, and that he must passively wait for a change of heart in the fickle crowd.

The third solution is offered by Iqbal Nath Sarshar, the poet about modernization. Bakha hears that some machine can clear latrines without the use of hands, and he is thrilled beyond control. He feels that machine will solve all his problems. He returns home as an enlightened man, full of hope, dreaming that the evil of unsociability will soon disappear and finally accepting the machine as the answer to the problem. Ambedkar points out:

Untouchability has ruined the Untouchables the Hindus and ultimately the nation as well if depressed classes gained their self-respect and freedom, they would contribute not only to their own progress and prosperity but by their industry, intellect and courage prosperity of the nation (Ambedkar 92-93).

Anand seems to be in favour of machine which is clearly seen in the depiction of the poet who is mouthpiece of Anand. According to Anand the evil of conservatism
which has killed the springs of life. Scientific outlook, intellectual change, avoidance of class consciousness, abolishing the gap between the rich and the poor, acceptance of machine for the purpose of uplifting the humanity are chief sources for social change. Reason brought about a revolution in the west and it was useful in dislodging many superstitions and false beliefs. The spirit of modernity draws its inspiration from the purifying influence of reason.

Anand’s profound conviction is that life must be revolutionized by the rational spirit of modernity. The development of society requires the adoption of scientific inventions. The novelist affirms the view that traditions and conventions have made life wretched and inhuman. So Iqbal Singh thinks that science humanizes man and life and it provides materials for keeping the surroundings clean and healthy. When technology develops there will be no need of manual toilette cleaning and it paves the way for the transformation of society. Anand feels that improving the external aspect of life in terms of sanitation and hygiene and dislodging meaningless conventions with the help of scientific rationalism constitutes the theme of modernity.

Bakha is pleased to listen to the voice of the poet Iqbal Singh Sarshar who advocates the installation of modern sanitary system as a way of removing untouchability. It is like returning to the modified culture in which one is born—a purified Hinduism which can incorporate aspects of Western Culture, such as the flush system. The poet says:
And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it—the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (Anand 146).

Bakha feels that the poet is closer to the heart of the problem because dung-cleaning which brings indignity to the man is performed by a machine. The problem of Bakha involves an essential question of recognition of his social status. This is what R.T. Robertson calls ‘the central paradox of the novel’. Bakha is craving for an identity with his culture. But he “is both isolated from and bound to his culture: it will not allow him fully to participate in the society and it cannot release him from it because of the essential service he performs for it”. The infamy and dishonor associated with his dung-cleaning profession is no longer tolerable. The poet’s suggestion of the flush system pleased him very much. Saros Cowasjee observes: “But the mention of a ‘machine’ which clears dung and which would enable a sweeper to change his profession so that he would no longer be thought of as an untouchable grips his attention.”

It is an indispensable step in the reformer’s scheme of mitigating the evil of untouchability. Julian Simons points out that it was Anand’s firm belief that plumbing plus good will can destroy caste-distinctions. A close reading of Untouchable will make it clear that Anand’s “commitment to the dehumanizing situation of the teeming millions of our country’s poor is absolutely unmistakable” (Leo Tagore 95). His commitment is revealed in the form of “a message for his culture in Untouchable” (Robertson 10). An
internal change in the heart and an external change in the form of a machine will remove the evil of untouchability in slow degrees; this is the message Anand offers through his novel, Untouchable.

The time gap between the writing of the two novels is obvious not only from the changed time and scene, but also in terms of thought and content. If Untouchable is a novel in which, as C.D. Narasimhaiah rightly pointed out “doctrines and dogmas are assimilated into a total sensibility” (Kohli 209). in The Road these doctrines and dogmas have been more clearly defined though underplayed. The emphasis now is not on the state of the downtrodden and their submissive attitude but on the senile attitude of the high caste Hindus and the newly found courage and determination of the suppressed people. While in 1929-1932, when Untouchable was written, the caste factor was a major factor in the society. By 1961 it had been rendered somewhat invalid by the changed times and circumstances and accorded sanction only by a very small segment of the society. This is more than evident by the defiant attitude of characters like Bhikhu and Dhooli Singh in The Road. Further, while Untouchable sounds somewhat sentimental as well as didactic, The Road appears more realistic and compassionate. And that is another reason why it is the mature of the two novels, even if it overtly gives the impression of having been hurriedly written.

Further, while the Dalits in Untouchable are riddled with the false sense of Karma and are willing to succumb to pressures, the Dalits in The Road, even when finding refuge in religion, do not regard the caste Hindus in anyway superior, despite the fact that they partially have resigned themselves to their fate. A significant difference between caste Hindus in the two novels is that while the high caste individuals sincerely believed
in their superiority and in their divine right to prevent the Dalits from doing certain things, in *The Road*, it is mainly vanity and the ego problems that we face. Thakur Singh, the landlord in *The Road* makes efforts to prevent the Dalits from constructing a road, while in *Untouchable* the Lalaji sincerely feels having been polluted by a simple touch of a Dalit boy. Religion also comes under a much stronger attack in *The Road* as compared to *Untouchable*. Another significant point is that the Dalits in *The Road* succeed in their mission despite heavy odds. Further, according to Balarama Gupta: “Anand’s predilection for the machine, which, he believes, is a potent instrument in having the road for man’s prosperity, is an idea just hinted at in *Untouchable* but it finds clearer expression in *The Road* wherein the outcastes take the help of a road-engine to complete the construction of the road.” Apart from the thematic similarity and the similarity between incidents, situation and characters, and conceding the point that *The Road* is an extension of *Untouchable* it is definitely the former which is a superior work, from any critical yardstick. If *Untouchable* is a novel of struggle, *The Road* is a novel of achievement, in more senses than one: the construction of the road despite obstructions, the humiliation of high caste Hindus, and the coming of a new sense of direction. For its more profound thought content, action and humanism, *The Road* is certainly one of Anand’s finest works. Vivekananda says “the greatest National sin is the neglect of the masses and that is one of the causes of our downfall” (Vivekananda 327-28).
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