CHAPTER-II

UNTOUCHABLE

Anand’s first novel *Untouchable* was published in 1935. It is not only Anand’s first novel but the most popular and most compact and well knit novel. It brings to light the sorrows and sufferings that caste Hindu inflicted on the untouchables and the other sections of society like the outcastes, the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers and the grass cutters. This novel breathes a strong protest against social injustice meted out to untouchables with unflinching realism. In this novel Anand describes the story of a single day in the life of an untouchable, Bakha, in the town of Bulashah. All happenings have been artistically packed in order to create an artistic effect. Mulk Raj Anand, a prolific writer of Indian writings in English was the champion of underdogs, particularly the deprived and marginalized section of the society. Being a founder member of the Indian progressive writer’s Association, he focused on the deprived people and advocated their cause. Anand belonged to that generation of Indian writers in English when the writers had to do a yeoman’s service not only for the liberation of the country, but also for the emancipation of the people from the evils of caste and religion. Anand is deeply concerned with a social problem of national dimension in his first novel, *Untouchable*. He takes up the role of a writer committed to eradication of the evils of society. Srinivasa Iyengar has pointed out his remark in this connection, “The novel presents the picture of a place of a society, and of certain persons, not easily to be forgotten picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy.”[1]

In this novel, Mulk Raj Anand has introduced one of his major themes, the theme of tradition versus modernity. However, the central theme remains “the age
old injustice perpetrated by traditional Hindu society upon a whole class people within its fold.”[2] This novel reflects the deep rooted prejudices, the barbarism and the cruelty with which man inflicts human beings. In the Untouchable, Anand has depicted his heart–felt experiences of the dehumanizing social evil. In this connection he says about the novel, Untouchable:

The book poured out like hot lava from 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 molding his personality and transmitting it from actuality into the hero of a nightmare. [3]

Through Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand draws our attention towards a number of questionable customs and social ways of the Hindu Society of the thirties, particularly the caste system. It makes us conscious of the various problems of the untouchables who are ill treated, underfed and exploited by the upper strata of our society. This orthodox social system made Anand’s conscience paint the picture of caste ridden society, having been divided since ancient times, on the basis of caste, into four sections—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. 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. They treated him as outcaste, as faceless creature of dirt. “Anand’s maiden venture Untouchable is a fine example of great technical
skill and artistic handling of a plot spoilt somewhat by the propagandistic element. It is here that the sufferer and the savior belong to widely divergent worlds.”[4]

Anand describes Bakhas’s morning round of duties with a painstaking, particularly, stressing upon the mechanical efficiency with which the boy carries on his essential services and the inhumanity and callousness with which the beneficiaries receive it as if it is a matter of no account whatsoever. Three rows of latrines to clean single-handed and several times too were an effort to bring cleanliness in the place of filth and possible disease. Performing silently with patience which is the budge of the subaltern in Indian society, his father’s counseling adds some instructions to it, “You should try and get to know them. You have got to work for them all your life, my son, after I die.”[5] He is not destined for education as the schools were meant for the higher caste children and not for the lowly sweepers. He has a good physique and the five basic elements have their equal share in him. The full warmth of the sun lends him the ability to work to feel fast. Like other young individuals, Bakha also has nourished some private dreams in his life but in vain.

Anand’s selection of Bakha, a sweeper boy, as the protagonist of Untouchable marks a revolutionary departure from the tradition of Indian fiction writing. Ever since his early childhood Anand had a feeling of sympathy and tenderness for the poor and discarded segments of society. In his boyhood Anand had played with the children of sweepers attached to the regiment where his father was an employer. Through the portrait of Bakha, Anand presents that the former seems to be a typical representative untouchable exempling the plight of not only the so-called Hindu untouchables but also of dispossessed people everywhere. The novel, indeed, presents Anand’s attempts at distilling a social metaphor which takes in its sweep a whole range of postulates of Hindu culture. It is a kind of
dialectical work centered on an exploration of the possibilities of achieving synthesis or spiritual restoration. *Untouchable* is based on the theme of ostracization and isolation of untouchables from Hindu society. It was a new a revolutionary theme in novel. E.M. Forster remarks:

*Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian, who observed from outside. No European, however, sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he could not have known enough above his troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because the world would have been involved in indignation and self pity. [6]

*Untouchable* is written in the tradition of social realism. We can note social realism in its subject matter, its presentation, atmosphere, characterization and language. Here Anand describes with remarkable realism and pictures the outcaste’s colony in Bulashah. The colony situated on the outskirts of the city is a dark, damp and dreary place which suggests the feeling of apathy and indifference of the caste Hindus towards untouchables. The scavengers, leather workers, washer men, barbers and water carriers live in sheer isolation from the civilized life. The sweepers who work for the maintenance and cleanliness are destined to live in places, unknown to hygienic facilities and sanitation. They are not allowed to draw water from the well and they have to depend for it on the mercy of Caste Hindus. Bakha, one of the sons of Lakha, the Jamadar of sweepers of the town and cantonment, is a child of twentieth century. He protests and resents against the callousness and barbarity of caste Hindus. Bakha’s day consists of a series of incidents, some unhappy and some happy, which alternate with a measured regularity bringing out many responses from him. He is officially in charge of public latrines of three rows. He has been working on probation in the barracks of
the British regiment for some years. Englishmen treat him with great understanding and consideration.

It is a cold morning of an autumn day. His father, Lakha, who is old and weak, first of all ill treats him. He calls him “illegally begotten” in the early hours of the morning and asks him to go out to clean latrines. Then Havildar Charat Singh abuses him for not cleaning latrines. He does his work dexterously and skillfully. After cleaning the latrines Bakha returns to the cottage but does not get anything to satiate his hunger. His sister Sohini goes to the well to bring water. She has to wait at the well for long time. The untouchables are not allowed to go up the circular platform of the well because the caste Hindus think that the untouchables’ touch would pollute water. At last Pandit Kali Nath, the lustful priest, pours water into Sohini’s pitcher and asks her to come to the temple to clean the courtyard.

Anand’s portrayal of the wretched living condition and unhygienic surroundings, and sub-standard treatment given to the low caste people parallels the pathetic pictures of Victorian oppression and injustice presented by Charles Dickens in his novels. In his quest for identity, Bakha seeks the sympathy of the Muslim smacker and he Tonga walla, another subaltern in the caste ridden Hindu society. His dreams are pathetically shattered by a “Sharp, clear slap.” His sister Sohini too is subjected to inter caste abuses and recriminations when she approaches the well for water. But pathetically she becomes the object of the priest’s lust. Being a dalit she becomes the first recipient of Pandit Kali Nath’s generosity as she seems to satisfy his waves of amorousness. He tries to malign her to come and clean the courtyard of his house at the temple. On her arrival he holds her by her breasts when she bends in the cavalry of his house. Out of anger she screams but the Pundit comes out shouting, “He had been defiled.”
In this novel Pundit Kali Nath typifies gluttony. His mind is mostly preoccupied with the various delicacies he loves. This reveals his gluttony standing in front of the temple and shouting “Polluted, Polluted” with his accusing finger on poor Sohini. The great Pundit’s misbehavior with Sohini and his shameless accusation that she made physical contact with him and defiled him is a typical illustration of the general hypocritical behavior of the white-washed guardians of religion. It also shows that lust knows no untouchability. Pundit Kali Nath’s lustful behavior with Sohini is only a human frailty whereas his accusation that she polluted him with her touch is beyond doubt diabolic. Pundits like Kali Nath, are pilots leading the Indians society. In Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand “focuses his lenses on the hypocrisy, the dual standards and the perfidy underlying the facade of purity and spirituality.”[7] Religious diplomacy and hypocrisy were real instruments to exploit the untouchables. As in this incident, the 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 his novel Untouchable.

Bakha, an enthusiastic and optimistic boy, eagerly looks forward to get the gift of a hockey stick from Charat Singh in the afternoon. His felicity reaches climax when, with a packet of jilebis in the hand and the taste of the warm and sweet syrup in his mouth, he moves about the market. Bakha, whose shadow pollutes a Brahmin, touches a caste Hindu. He is abused and beaten as all people sympathize with the Brahmin. He has been suffering a series of humiliating experiences right from the morning. A Hindu shopkeeper throws a packet of cigarettes at him, the jilebis are thrown at him like a rickets ball, and then he accidently touches a Brahmin. Again a high born lady throws a piece of bread at
him from the top of her house as if he were a dog. These traumatic experiences upset him.

Bakha reaches the big temple of the town. Being a sweeper his entry is prohibited in it. He wants to see it and the images of gods and goddesses in it. As he tries to enter it, the devout priest shouts “polluted, polluted”. Pandit Kali Nath, whose design to molest Sohini has been frustrated, also shouts. In a fury Bakha sees his sorrowful sister Sohini who tells him about Kali Nath’s attempt to molest her. Bakha is enraged and he wants to take revenge on the priest. Seeing him in a threatening posture the crowd run helter shelter and the corrupt priest also runs away. Humiliated, dejected and depressed Bakha returns home and tells his father, “I won’t go to the town again. I have done with his job.” Lakha, whom lifelong slavery has made completely humble and submissive, tries to calm his son by saying that there are some generous souls among the caste Hindus. Bakha does not relish the wet bread which Rakha has brought from the barracks. He leaves his cottage and goes to attend the marriage of Ram Charan’s sister.

Though the society does not treat Bakha as a human being but he proves to be more human than the so-called protectors of humanity. Bakha collects a hockey stick from Havildar Charat Singh and participates in the hockey match. The Burra Babu’s son gets injured in the hockey game. Bakha lifts him in his hands and brings the boy to his home. But instead of receiving appreciation for his humanitarian act, Bakha receives assault and insult for he had polluted the injured boy with his touch. We see the height of insult when one of the members of the family of the injured boy makes a bitter comment on Bakha, “Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! Offspring of a pig! I’ll have to go and get washed! I was going to business and now-now, on account of you I’ll be late.”
Bakha is much troubled with his insulting job and his low caste. He meets Colonel Hutchinson of the local Salvation Army. He suggests that Christianity is the only solution of untouchability but Bakha is not satisfied. The Missionary cannot tell him who the Christ is. Mahatma Gandhi, whom Bakha listens to in a public meeting, provides another solution. Gandhi’s two ways that all Indians are equal, and the account he gives of a Brahmin doing sweeper’s work goes straight to the boy’s heart. Hard upon this comes the third solution, put into the mouth of a modernist poet. No god is needed to rescue the untouchables, no vows of self sacrifice and abnegation on the part of more fortunate Indians, but simply and solely the flush system. According to the third solution the introduction of water closets and main drainage throughout India will eradicate all this wicked rubbish about untouchability.

Bakha returns to his father and to take rest on his wretched bed thinking now of the Mahatma, now of the Machine. “His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand.” Untouchable is a novel where Anand’s purpose is “to analyze the existentialistic structure of the untouchable’s predicament.” The untouchables suffer from the abominable effects of “discrimination, deprivation and a kind of denaturalization of moral and other perishable values of a civilized society.” The anguish of all untouchables is found in Bakha’s words: “Unlucky! Unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?” The novel is a powerful indictment of the caste system and the writer treats untouchability as a social crime against human dignity by showing the perversion in the Caste Hindus. The novel, Untouchable presents before us the picture of a place, of society, and of certain persons that cannot be forgotten, a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy.
The attainment of independence ushered in a golden era in India. Untouchability was legally and constitutionally abolished. Various constitutional measures were adopted to ameliorate the sad predicament of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The constitutional safeguards have not yet brought the joy of freedom to the outcastes who form the largest segment of Indian society. Even the benefit of the policy of reservation in jobs has been availed by the privileged class among the scheduled castes and tribes and the poor and the needy among them are still deprived of their fundamental rights, freedom and justice. During his visit to Haryana Anand was shocked to see “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.” Anand, like the Bakha who badly carried him to his mother decides to carry the cause of Bakhas to the sensitive souls of this nation giving them dignity and heroism. It is with this aim that he created the heroes, Bakha in *Untouchable* and Bhikhu in *The Road*. Anand has compared the two chief characters of these two novels with reference to their cunning and hypocrisy:

Pandit Kalinath of *Untouchable* and Pandit Suraj Mani of *The Road* are black marketeers of their religion for selfish ends. As they have not received the divine light, they are incapable of the Gandhian realization that untouchables are children of God or Harijans. In their shallowness, they mix up religion, politics and social life and vehemently preach on pollution by touch, pollution from distance or on the *karma* theory which says that the suffering of the untouchables is only a punishment divinely ordained for their deeds in their previous births. [8]
Anand had a purpose of “preparing to strike back and to present the case of the Indian proletariats in front of the world.” This was the motto of his writings and *Untouchable* becomes the starting point of that grand mission. Anand’s humanism is the synthesis of thoughts of the great western thinkers and Indian medieval saints and preachers who did not believe in the discrimination of human being on the grounds of caste and creed. He blended Buddha’s compassion, Gandhi’s love of truth and non violence and pity for the fallen and disinherited in his writings. It is the humanistic concern of his writings that finds expression in his novels and short stories where the poor, downtrodden and oppressed people are taken as the protagonist for his mission of social reformation. Their struggle for the sense of belonging and struggle to find a space in the society of that time is the unique characteristic of his writings. Living in London Anand preferred to present the contemporary socio-political scene in all its hues. A.J.Thomas writes:

In spite of his western rationalistic leanings, and personal lifestyle, he followed Mahatma Gandhi closely for a time, on account of his humanistic, compassionate spirit, living in the Sabarmati Ashram where Gandhi corrected the manuscript of his *Untouchable*. It is quite another story that when it was eventually turned down by the 19 publishers, he thought even of suicide, as quoted in the “Meet the Author”, brochure of Sahitya Academy. Success came to him later, when staying on in London and pursuing a full time writing career and becoming a world class writer was very much within his reach, he opted to return to India and to dedicate the rest of his life for literary creation, for the uplift of the marginalized, in a language which was abhorred by the traditionalists as the *Mletcha’s*. [9]
The art and the artist have remained a point of debate since long. But Mulk Raj Anand firmly believed that art must have the quality of servitude, and then only the real purpose of art can be achieved. For this purpose a writer should strike at the bare realities of the society so that a standard may be set up in the society. That longing for perfection is a common human instinct. Thus, an artist endowed with the sensibilities of head and heart tries to establish perfection through art. In his article, “Art and Essence”, which was published in *The Times of India* after his death, Anand wrote:

Perhaps it is an instinctive love for perfection, for conference, for making things really well he is doing a job or work for relating himself to the indefinable source of creations, for getting to the centre of gravity inside himself and for discovering the unknown, outside him, in the light of his own awareness. [10]

And then the writer performs the role of a judge, therefore, Anand agrees with Shelley who said that the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world; and this dictum of Shelley was supported and practiced by him. *Untouchable* is the story of a caste sweeper boy who leaves his home early in the morning with the alarming words of his old father Lakha, the Zamadar or the head of the sweepers in the cantonment of Bulashah. Bakha, the central protagonist of novel lives in the dungeon, no better than the work he performs. The novelist employs the stream of consciousness technique to reveal the mental condition of Bakha. It is not only the day of the mechanical time from dawn to dusk, but it is the story of the generations together that they have been suffering. The whole life sketch has been drawn sympathetically.
The feeling of inferiority haunts Bakha wherever he goes for the work. This becomes natural to him as whenever he goes he has to face the scourge of untouchability. Although he cleans the dirt and human soil, he is ditties in comparison with things he cleans. The Mohammedan do not mind touching a sweeper, but the Hindus have a grave concern of untouchability as they do not like him. Bakha says to himself “it is only the Hindus, and the outcaste who is not sweeper. For them I am a sweeper, untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!” Bakha being an untouchable hence to avoid pollution by touch, the confectioner throws the packet of jalebis, like a cricket ball, for Bakha to catch and he catches it. He then places four nickel coins on a seaboard near which the confectioner’s assistant has been standing ready with some water to sprinkle and remove the pollution and then he walks away. This makes him target to call out, “posh, posh, sweeper coming”, and he suddenly hears someone shouting at him:

Keep to the side of the road, ohe low-caste vermin!’ He suddenly heard someone shouting at him. Why don’t you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock–eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on his morning!

Mulk Raj Anand focuses on the oppressed downtrodden and thus brings their problems to the surface so that an average reader might be able to understand the plight of the innocent creatures who suffer for no fault of their own but simply because they are the outcaste as they are born in that particular class of untouchables. In fact, to correct the world order we have to think of an individual and his emancipation, and only then we can do something for the betterment of the
world. Now the question arises whether to accept it in the same way or to defy it for the sake of betterment. But Anand’s heroes are always living and adjusting with the present and struggling for the future. They do not defy the codes set for them immediately; rather they want the codes to be changed by the oppressors. The novelist has presented the deplorable conditions under which these outcastes live:

As they sat or stood in the sun, showing their dark hands and feet they had a curiously lackadaisical, lazy, lousy look about them. It seemed their insides were concentrated in the act of emergencies, of a new birth, as it were, from the raw, bleak wintry feeling in the souls of the world of warmth. The tent of the dark, narrow, dingy little prison cells of their one roomed homes lurked in them, however, even in the outdoor air. They were silent as if the act of liberation was too much for them to bear. The great life giver had cut the inscrutable knots that tied them up in themselves. It had melted the innermost parts of their being. And their souls stared at the wonder of it all, the mystery of it, the miracle of it.

Anand rejects the Vedic caste system which determines the position of a man according to his birth. The Vedic theory tells that the untouchable or sudras are the lowest creatures and they have no rights to listen anything which is sacred to the Hindus because if they ever listen the holy text, the text itself will be polluted. They are born to bear all kinds of atrocities of higher castes. Such scenario could be created by a writer only who was well versed with the behavior and customs of the people in this country. This can be further supported by the statement of E. M. Forster who also believed that the creation of such appealing character as Bakha could only be accomplished by an Indian writer who had
complete knowledge of the socio-religious institutions. E.M. Forster wrote in the Preface to the novel:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even becomes 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 consolation of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves and to rearrange their plans for the day. [11]

That was the plight of the outcastes in the dependent India. It is all true that the pen is mightier than the sword and this dictum is almost true to the writings of Mulk Raj Anand who was vociferous about the social changes that really occurred in India after independence. The outcastes were not allowed to get water, the most essential thing for human life:

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw the water from it, the Hindus of the 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.

The hostility towards them was quite evident as they had been anxiously awaiting the arrival of some upper caste person who could provide them some water. On one such occasion when Bakha’s sister Sohini was waiting for water near a well, Pundit Kali Nath happens to reach there. As soon as he arrives, there was a commotion among the outcastes to get water and they shouted for his favor. But
the pundit was kind enough to pour some water in the pitcher of Sohini, not for the sake of charity, but because he was much impressed by her beauty and charming body:

She had a sylph-like form, not thin but full-bodied within the limits of her graceful frame, well-rounded on the hips, with an arched narrow waist from which descended the folds of her salwars and above which were her full, round, globular breasts, jerking slightly, for lack of a bodice, under her transparent muslin shirt.

The other cause for his pouring water was that he wanted to cure his constipation:

The appeal seemed even to his dry as dust self, irritable. But he was an ill honored old devil, and had it been not that as he stood and reflected, he realized that the exercise at the well might do some good to the chronic constipation from which he suffered, he was not consented to help the outcastes.

The outcastes were deprived of education which is a major concern in the novel. They were not supposed to read and write. But Bakha’s love for reading has been immensely described in this novel. He wanted to go to school and learn English so that he could converse in the barracks with the British soldiers. He wanted to get some education and wanted to become a sahib. For him, “The anxiety of going to school was, “How beautiful it felt! How nice it must be to be able to read and write!” By going to school he wanted to upgrade his status, as the novelist presents, but again he is reminded of his caste and status:

He was a sweeper’s son and could never become a babu. Later still he realized that there was no school which would admit him because the
parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of the low cast man’s sons.

The outcastes were leading a life of deprivation as the food they used to get was the waste thrown by the upper caste people. Lakha, the father of Bakha remembers in the novel an event of the day when the former went to bring the medicine from the clinic of the Hakim. He was not listened by the Hakim and the feeling of his distress is reflected in the following sentences:

For an hour I stood like that in a corner, near the heap of litter which I had collected, and I was feeling as if a scorpion was stinging me. That I couldn’t buy medicine for my son when I was willing to pay my hard earned money for. It troubled me. I had seen many bottles full of medicine in the house of Hakimji and knew that one of the bottles contained medicine for you, and yet I couldn’t get it. My heart was with you and my body was outside the house of the Hakim.

Moreover, soon as Lakha reaches near the Hakim and almost touches the feet of the Hakim, there was uproar in the medicine house, “BHANGI! BHANGI! People began to disperse as the Hakim’s feet had become defiled. He was red and pale in turn, and shouted at the highest pitch of his voice ‘CHANDAL! By whose orders have you come here?’”

Denial of water at the well, denial of education and the pollution through their touching of the upper caste people, were the rude impressions buried in the tender mind of Bakha who performed the work of cleaning the dung and human soil. Perhaps he was born to clean it. This is not enough, but the abuses they get in exchange for their hard work and the inhuman conditions created for them have been presented graphically in this novel. The abusive addresses of the higher class
people towards the untouchables are a common accepted way of conversation, “They always abuse us because we are sweepers, because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That’s why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That’s why they don’t touch us.” Bakha realizes the wickedness of the society in which touching a human being like him is a malediction but touching a dirty bull like the one he has seen just then as benediction.

Like a human being Bakha has also a desire to see and visit the Hindu temples. Like other people in society he should have every right to see and worship the idols of gods and goddesses. With a strong desire Bakha climbs up the stairs of the temple as he was keenly interested to see the different idols of the Hindu deities inside the temple. He was ascending as nobody was around him but his arrival had polluted the temple. At the same time he was stunned by the alarming call by one of the upper caste persons “polluted, polluted, polluted! “Get of the steps, scavenger off with you! You have defiled our temple. Now you will have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, Dog!” The upper caste people believed that Bakha had defiled the shrine which they will have to purify. According to the norms as laid down in the Holy Books, a temple can be polluted by a low caste man even when he reaches merely on the steps at the door of the temple. In Untouchable the upper caste people say, “We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrines.”

The upper caste and the powerful people of that time treated the outcastes as their moveable, yet untouchable property. They considered the sweepers as dirty just because they cleaned their dirt. Even for water, the basic necessity of human existence, the sweeper had to depend on the mercy of caste Hindus. Anand has presented a heart touching scene of the untouchables waiting to get water in Untouchable: “Some standing up, bending and various joining their palms in
beggary, others twisting their lips in various attitudes in servile appeal and abject humility as they remained seated separate.” We see one other scene when the untouchables wait for water near a well:

The crowed round the well, congested the space below its high brick platform, morning, noon, night, joining their hands in 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 soul condescended to listen to them or to help them.”

After the molestation of Sohini by Pundit Kali Nath, Bakha felt distressed and furious. But he knew his limitations will not do anything to the hypocrite Pundit as the latter belonged to the privileged class:

A super specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like a tiger at bay. And yet there was a futility written on his face. He could not overstep the barriers, which the conventions of his superiors have built up to protect their weakness against him.

He has to face the double problems within the hierarchy of the castes among the untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand presents here the worst sufferings of Bakha who is not at all accepted by the washer man and the other outcastes of Bulashah because he belonged to the lowest among low. Chhota, the son of a leather worker and Ramcharan, the son of a washer man always regarded themselves superior to Bakha, who was a sweeper and the lowest among the low. The insults Bakha faces when he goes for the food in the barracks and the throwing of bread to him shows that he who cleans the litter of the people is deprived of all the rights of a common
human being. Anand not only criticizes the high caste people for ill-treating and exploiting the untouchables but also is conscious that even among the lower castes those somewhat higher in the hierarchical caste scale consider the lower ones to be inferior to them. Sohini, being the lowest caste among the outcastes, is naturally looked down upon by Gulabo a washer-woman who calls her ‘a bitch of sweeper women’ 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 presented Bakha in a condition where he struggles for a space in the society, but at the same time he doesn’t leave his duty. Here he starts as a man who has to fight for his position in the society. He believes that man is the master of his destiny and can change his fate. The solution is not in tolerating the atrocities, but in finding out the solution of the problems of the ages-long oppressions and atrocities. Bakha finds the humanistic attachment from Charat Singh who provides him a hockey stick, the game which Bakha liked to play. The significant treatment of the humanistic attitude in Untouchable is that Anand admires man, even adores him and believes that:

Man has in him enough creative energy and imagination to transform himself and raise himself to glorious pinnacle of dignity and to rid man kind of its unspeakable misery and pain, all through his tireless physical and mental energy. It is to enable man to achieve this end that Anand fervently pleads for the emergence among men of a new conception of the role of man in this vast universe. [12]
Bakha’s character has variously been studied by scholars. Syed Afroz Ali says, “Bakha is a presentation not of bare facts associated with Dalit existence, but a sorded projection of an evil, of a stigma, and of the ferocity the bias is fraught with.”[13] In the sensitive portrayal of an Individual like Bakha, Mulk Raj Anand displays his penetrating thought and human attitude in understanding the grim realities of the social life in India. It is a revolutionary novel in the sense that it has an outcaste as its chief protagonist. Anand’s turning to the evil of the caste system even at the very start of his writings’ career is understandable of the dehumanizing social evil, to stir the springs of tenderness in them, and to rally them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable or a just social order may come into being. C. J. George’s observation about Untouchable is important when he says:

It is a tragic poem of an individual caught in the cross-roads of hypocrisy. At the same time the novel has a tragic beauty of its own. The very structure of Untouchable and the classical purity of its form bring Bakha’s drawing inwardness and loveliness into sharp relief. His inner urge to revolt and his awareness of the inability of successfully doing so makes him stoically placed. [14]

In the latter part of the novel Bakha is seen going to the town and listening there to Mahatma Gandhi who says something for the betterment of Bakha and his community. The behavior of Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the local Salvation Army seems to be favorable towards him in comparison with other people. The Gandhian ideas about the uplifting of the downtrodden in India is highly admired by the novelist and, therefore, Bakha at last feels blessed when he listens Gandhi and goes back to his father with ideas that Gandhi had referred to in his speech. Listening to Gandhi uttering the word harijan, Bakha was much excited and was happy that Gandhiji was talking about them. He felt good that he had arrived there to listen to him patiently. Mulk Raj Anand has presented different solutions to get
rid of the evil of untouchability and one of them was Gandhiji’s approach for uplifting of the untouchables. Then concluding part of Gandhiji’s message to Bakha was all inspiring and alarming: “They should cultivate the habit of cleanliness, so that no one shall point his finger at them. Some of them are addicted to the habits of drinking and gambling of which they must get rid.” M K Naik has appreciated Anand’s *Untouchable* in terms of its form and structure. He finds Anand’s narrative art a thing of perfect unity and chiseled finish. The scholar critic observes:

In *Untouchable*, Anand’s fictional genius sprang up fully armed like Pallas Athene from the head of Jove. Never again was he to write a novel in which content and form were so perfectly fused, a triumph of creativity achieving the maximum of effect with the minimum of means. [15]

Towards the end of the novel, Bakha seems to be slightly inclined towards the better solution of the flush system. It can also replace the label posted on some sections of society as scavengers. Here we see Bakha’s quest for freedom. After the introduction of the flush system the sweepers will be free from the stigma of untouchability and they can assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. Then the suggestion by the poet that there is a machine which shall clean the human soil really attracted Bakha’s attention. When the poet tells Bakha about the machine he is very much jubilant to know it and he wanted to pass that idea to his father thinking that a machine shall perform the actions of the sweeper and hopes that perhaps this may be able to provide some emancipation to him and his caste from the abuses and insults of the upper caste people. Anand in *Untouchable* pleads for the dignity of labor, be it sweeping or scavenging. Discrimination on account of caste is against the tenets of
humanity. Respect for one’s humanity and dignity will promote the spirit of humanism. A close reading of *Untouchable* highlights Anand’s belief:

Man is the highest reality in this world. He has in him enough creative energy and imagination to transform 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 admires man and even adores him but he is not blind to man’s weaknesses and the beauty of life that lies in man’s constant attempts to rise from lower passion to heights of splendor. [16]

*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.” The chief purpose 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, he 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 this 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. There is no doubt in the fact that Anand has successfully used irony as a weapon to expose the social evil of untouchability but at some places we see the examples of direct propagation of ideology. H. M. Williams has expressed his views on Anand’s failure and success as a novelist:
Untouchable suggests both the strength and weakness of Anand as a novelist; fine sympathetic portrayal of Indian reality in terms of the lives of the dispossessed, to some degree marred by glib ‘socialistic’ answers to imponderable questions bound up with religious traditions and deep-seated customs. [17]

Some other critics have also commented on Anand’s great novel, Untouchable. Professor C. D. Narsimhaiah has commented on the basic issues involved in the writing of this novel, “In the novel [Untouchable] doctrine and dogmas are assimilated into a total sensibility which shapes his imagination and gives life an epoch and its hope and its aspiration and its curse.”[18] Indra Mohan calls Anand’s Untouchable as a social document: “Anand’s down-to-earth portrayal of the naked realities of our social evils which are dismal and harrowing, makes Untouchable a social document besides being a novel first of its kind in the colonial Indian social context.”[19]
References:


5. Anand, Mulk Raj. Untouchable. New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1981. All textual references have been taken from this edition of the text.


11. Forster, E.M. “Preface” to Untouchable.p.vii


