UNTOUCHABLE

UNTOUCHABLE is Dr. Mulk Raj Anand's first novel. With this novel, he burst upon the literary horizon as a new voice. It is a novel of protest against the contemptuous and beastly treatment meted out to the downtrodden in the Indian society. The portrayal of the life of a sweeper Bakha in the novel is realistic. E. M. Forster writes:

"Avoiding rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of the subject and purified it... and it is to the directness of the attack that Mr. Anand's success is probably due." 1 The protagonist Bakha—representative of the sweeper community—is the worst sufferer. Again, E. M. Forster openly mentions the traditional prejudice against the untouchables because of their dealing with human excretion:

[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 of them are outcasts from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it. 2

It would appear to any discerning reader that through Bakha, Anand is protesting against the institution of untouchability ingrained in the Indian society from the very ancient times. The caste system has played a pervasive and pernicious role in India. 3
Historically speaking, Manu, the ancient Indian thinker had devised caste system as a division of labour. This certainly facilitated the working of the society but with the passage of time, the caste system became very rigid and started being determined by birth. Here the question of the origin of this institution of untouchability is not so important as the plight of untouchables in the Indian social set up. In fact, the crucial problem is that of their total seclusion and their ruthless exploitation by the high caste people.

In the caste hierarchy, the sweepers rank the lowest, hence the most degraded.

Anand is practical and does not believe in philosophical abstraction. The paramount need is to eradicate this social evil by bringing about a change in the system. He is quite explicit on the point. Anand believes: "Philosophers have so far interpreted the world, the thing is to change it." Obviously, in the novelist's view, mere sympathy and feeling pity for them, cannot solve the problem. For him, ideas must swing into action. He writes: "I only wish our countrymen would try to combine ideas and actions and help to liberate the millions of our people from the frustrations placed in their way by those who have inherited superiorities." Anand is thus a conscious novelist because art has a purpose for him.

Many distinguished Indians like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru condemned this evil. Anand happened to see the misery of the downtrodden at
different army stations. He even made friends with some
sweeper boys whose poverty melted his heart. He could
not remain a silent spectator. So, he took up their cause in
almost all his novels. But first of all, he wrote a full-
length compact novel **UNTARCHABLE** which is full of protest
against the curse of untouchability, poverty and ignorance.
He stands for social justice. That is why he raises his voice
artistically through Bakha, particularly against the caste
system and *Varna-Asharam*. In fact, a human society
cannot exist in the real sense unless the evil of caste is
stamped out. The novel is really heart-rending in as much
as depicting a true and pathetic picture of Bakha.

In this novel, Anand makes us feel about the inside of
a young man. He gives to the reader an intensely emotional
experience of what it means to be an untouchable. In the
analysis which follows, the major experiences of Bakha
will be focussed directly from the book rather than
summarising that one day story of Bakha which is filled with
his degradation from dawn to dusk.

The novel begins with an autumn morning. Bakha wrapped -
up in an old outworn blanket is shivering while lying in
bed. He regards quilt as 'unsahib like', hence does not
use it to protect him from cold. In fact, he tries to
imitate 'Tommies' way of life. He does so because he is
not recognised as human being in the Indian society. He
tries to compensate his powerlessness because of his
sweeper's status by identifying himself with the English. His father Lakha who is a retired Jamadar, abuses him and asks him to get up early in the morning for going on his duty. Bakha develops a growing dislike for this old sickly man who himself does nothing. But when the famous hockey player Havildar Charat Singh of the 36 Dogra Regiment, shouts: "Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, scoundrel of a sweeper's son! Come and clean a latrine for me!"(15) he at once jumps out of his bed and goes to clean the latrines. But Charat Singh continues to shout at Bakha: "Why aren't the latrines clean, ohe rogue of a Bakha? There is not one fit to go near. I have walked all round. Do you know you are responsible for my piles? I caught the contagion sitting on one of those dirty latrines!"(16) Bakha does not get angry even at showers of abuses but cleans the latrines efficiently and speedily. Still his worth is never recognised by any one. He is treated most humiliatingly as if he were a non-existent thing. Of course, Bakha's existence is not being acknowledged by the high caste people. Existentially speaking, he is a cypher, a zero. Again existentially voiced, theistically or aesthetically every existent is unique and therefore deserves recognition. What is awful about the Indian society is that the existence of a whole group of people is being ignored in the name of religion or caste. The tragic side of their life is the total denial of existential freedom to them. Freedom is essential for
the growth of individual's personality. Sartre points out
the value of freedom:

The true limit of my freedom lies purely and
simply in the very fact that another apprehends
me as the Other-as Object and in that my situation
ceases for the other to be a situation and
becomes an objective form in which I exist as an
objective structure. It is this alienating
process of making an object of my situation
which is the constant and specific limit of
situation....

Bakha is the epitome of this situation. The second
incident takes place when he reaches a Pan-Cigarette shop
where he is not properly treated. He wants to buy a packet
of cigarettes and as such implores the shopkeeper to tell
him where to put his coin as the price of the cigarettes.
The shopkeeper pointing to a spot sprinkles water over the
coin in order to purify it." Then he flung a packet of
'Red -Lamp' cigarettes at Bakha, as a butcher might throw a
bome to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his
shop."(46)

This incident shows that untouchables have been reduced
to such a degraded position as they seem to have no right
to put forward a demand boldly for a thing even against cash
payment. They submit to a situation as if they were
having things free of cost. At first, Charat Singh humiliates
him. He feels less than those who are better placed. His
degradation is further highlighted when the shopkeeper
sprinkles water on the coin paid by him and throws a packet
of cigarettes at him in the most insulting manner. Thus Bakha is associated with impurity. The world in which he dwells, is a world of imposed values—the fixed essences. Whitman says: 'He who degrades another degrades me'.

It is therefore, not only the degradation of Bakha, but it is also the degradation of man. It is the degradation of every soul. The central question here is the very existence of Bakha who represents the whole class of sweepers. So his degradation becomes the significant hub around which Anand focuses his attention. The reader is shocked and filled with anguish at the unauthenticity of his life. His situation makes him incapable of giving outlet to his feelings because he has no courage to be himself, while on the other hand, the high caste people are free to do every sort of damned thing merely because they are twice-born.

Bakha is an intelligent worker but from no quarter does he receive a word of praise. Even at home, Lakha, like a typical old Indian father, devolves all the responsibilities on his eldest son Bakha who at the age of only eighteen years is overburdened with the strenuous routine of a sweeper as well as with the domestic duties. Besides this, there is a lot of difference in the views of the father and the son; the former fatalistically accepts the
old beliefs of casteism never thinking of the injustices
being heaped on the low caste people while the latter
represents modernity wishing to get rid of the evil of
untouchability. But Lakhya acts like a dictator always
trying to impose his will on his children, particularly on
Bakha. He himself keeps lying in bed smoking hookah and
often abusively continues to direct Bakha to get up earlier
and start working at the latrines. This creates tension
in Bakha's mind because he becomes the target of humiliation
not only from the high caste people but also from his own
father. Bakha's thoughts are indicative of his feelings
of protest against his father's suppression and his subject
submission before the high caste people:

He always keeps abusing me. I do all his
work for him. He appropriates the pay all
right. He is afraid of the sepoys and they
call him names. He abuses me .... I don't
take moment's rest and yet he abuses me. And if I go to play with the boys, he calls
me in the middle of the game to come and
attend to the latrines. (13)

Of course, there is a burning volcano within Bakha's
heart, but being rooted in that set-up of society he remains
a silent rebel. He often ignores his father's irritating
shouts. When he is lost in the thoughts of his mother's
love and affection, his father's biting words fall on his
ears: "Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten!" (15)
Bakha's resentment to his abusive language can be seen when
he whispers the word 'bully' to his father. He is so much
harassed that he cannot oppose his father's undue restrictions
and directions. Naturally, he wants to enjoy a bit of freedom but he cannot have it because of his poverty, caste and suppression. Though he is gifted with many potentialities, it is tragic that he cannot realise them. He has hopes and desires but the rigid caste system suppresses everything in him. Obviously, he is the victim of the Hindu orthodoxy, conventionalism and conservatism. He and his like never have the thrill of being alive. They often get lost in their hard struggle for survival.

Then again, another incident happens. Bakha while walking catches sight of a confectioner's shop and wants to eat burfi but he cannot buy it because he has only an eight anna piece with him. He is also afraid of his father for spending money over sweets. Still, he cannot resist the temptation of eating the cheapest sweet that he can buy. He justifies his buying of sweets: "If my father comes to know that I spend all my money on sweets ... but come, I have only one life to live ..., let me taste of the sweets; who knows, tomorrow I may be no more." (49) Most of the sweets are beyond his reach. At last, he decides to buy jalebies, the cheapest item and musters up his courage to ask for them. The text reads: "Four annas 'worth of jalebies,' Bakha said in a low voice, as he courageously advanced from the corner where he had stood. His head was bent. He was vaguely ashamed and self-conscious at being seen buying jalebies." He feels that he is not a free man.
To an existentialist, freedom is cardinal but one has to have the freedom to choose which is only possible when one frees oneself from one's Sanskaras, prohibitions and inhibitions. In other words, if one is subject to internalized stepping, throttling and paralysing voices, one is not free. So, Bakha is not free because he is not only the victim of social exploitation but also of his Sanskaras of being of the lowest caste which have become an internal inhibition in him. For example, he does not have the power or potency to protest when he is degraded to the maximum. He has been made impotent or depotentiated by the prevailing social climate.

The confectioner's contemptuous smile at his low taste for jalebis, which the former calls 'course stuff' is something vile. He weighs less and Bakha naturally gets upset "who knew he had been cheated, but dared not complain. He caught the jalebis which the confectioner threw at him like a cricket ball, placed four nickle coins on the shoe-board for the confectioner's assistant who stood ready to splash some water on them, and walked away, embarrassed yet happy."(50) Despite these moments of frustration, he enjoys a few juicy pieces and feels exhilarated. But unfortunately, his carefree mood and gay-abandonment do not last long. He continues walking absorbed in his own thoughts. He is taken aback when all of a sudden, he finds that he is being abused by an unknown person.
Keep to the side of the road, the low caste vermin! ... 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 a shirt I put on this morning! (50-1)

Bakha is terror-stricken, He is feeling extremely small, humble and servile. He cannot speak even to beg forgiveness of that high caste Hindu. But it is clear from his humble posture that he has confessed his guilt. Still, the man was not satisfied with his dumb humility. "(51) So, he again, gives a loud shout: "Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! .... I... I'll have to go - o-o... and get washed - d-d... I... I was going to business and now, on account of you, I'll be late." (51) Bakha wants to protest against the terror that is let loose on him but he cannot raise his voice because the ill-treatment meted out to this community, has made him servile and coward. He feels like rising in revolt against injustice but his deep-rooted fear and inferiority-complex make him realize about his lowest place in society. Thus when he is at the height of his anger, his sanskaras make him steep so low that he cannot actuate his revolting feelings into action. That is why "Bakha stood still, with his hands joined, though he dared to lift his forehead perspiring and knotted with its hopeless and futile expression of meekness." (52)

A big crowd gathers there but there is none to sympathise with his predicament. Everybody is against him. He could have easily escaped the situation by running away
knocking down the people surrounding him because he was
strong enough to do that. But if he had acted like that,
he would have polluted more people. This moral realisation
prevents him from taking this step. Some other people
also degrade him all the more. One of them says:

Don't know what the world is coming to!
These swines are getting more and more
uppish .... One of his brethren who cleans
the lavatory of my house, announced the
other day that he wanted ten rupees a month
instead of five rupees, and the food that
he gets from us daily. (52-3)

The aggrieved one says: "He walked like a Lat Sahib
like a Laxten Gornor: .... Just think, folks, think of the
enormity!" (53) Another old man laments? "I don't know
what the kali jug is coming to!" (53) The touched high caste
man again shouts: "As if he owned the whole street ....The
son of a dog!" (53) Meanwhile, some mischievous youngsters
come there and shout: "Oye son of a dog! Now tell us how
you feel. You who used to beat us!" (53) This false allegation
makes Sakha angry and as such, in self-defence, he denies
the charge even when a merchant calls him a liar: "Nahin,
Lalla ji, it is not true that I beat this child. It is not true .... I have erred now. I forget to call. I beg your
forgiveness. It would not happen again." (53) That shows
the ultimate plight of a sweeper, a downtrodden, a pad-dalit.

For Sakha, work is worship. He is an energetic worker
having a high sense of duty but the crowd heedlessly casts
aspersions on him that sound quite vulgar and mean. "Careless,
irresponsible swine! They don't want to work. They laze
about! They ought to be wiped off the surface of the earth!

(54) This is all a white lie but Bakhoo has to eat an humble-pie in view of the present situation. The Lalla even slaps him because he is not satisfied with mere abuses. Bakhoo though becomes furious, his anger remains unexpressed because he is the victim of social circumstances:

Bakhoo's turban fell off and the jalebies in the paper bag in his hand were scattered in the dust. He stoodghast then his whole countenance lit with fire and his hands were no more joined. Tears welled up in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. The accumulated strength of his giant body glinted in him with the desire of 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 slipped beyond reach into the street. (55)

In the meantime, a Muslim tonga-wallah who is also an untouchable in the eyes of orthodox Hindus, comes there and consoles Bakhoo a bit. But for Bakhoo, the humiliation is too much. His heart is injured beyond repair. He cannot stand all this. As a result of this, his anger finds expression in his tears. He, all the same, seems like a colossus full of fire of retaliation, with all his weakness gone. The culprit out of fear, gets out of his way running away like a jackal. Even then, a shopkeeper abusively asks Bakhoo to be more careful in future. Bakhoo -- the poor one, starts announcing "Pesh, pesh, sweeper coming, pesh, pesh, sweeper coming, pesh, pesh, sweeper coming!"

(55) Though he is helpless, his anger has not cooled down.
"But there was a smouldering rage in his soul. His feelings would rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire in fitful jerks when the recollection of abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him .... (55-6)

Bakha is burning in the fire of profound regret and repentance over his insult and smallness. He feels as if he were in a very deep gulf or in a bottomless pit. Actually a deep sense of shame makes his anguish inexpressible. He is full of fury and he thinks why he does not revolt against the cruel high caste people:

Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why didn't I shout to warn the people of my approach? ....I should have seen the high caste people in the street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them. But why couldn't I say something? Couldn't I have joined my hands to him and then gone away? The slap on my face! The coward! How he ran away, like a dog with the tail between his legs. That child! The liar! Let me come across him one day ....Not one of them spoke for me. The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused? .... They always abused us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That is why I came here .... The tonga-wallah was kind .... But he is a Mohammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Mohammadans and the Sahibs. It is only the Hindus, and the outcaste who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper - untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That is the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable! (56-7)

The abusing bugs him, tears him within but he is helpless. There is no one to stand by him. His mental conflict is great. His grief is intense because he feels
internally wounded. At one moment, he repents over his inaction but at the next moment, the age-old slavish mentality appears in him. That is why he thinks of his submission before the high caste Hindus. His agony is great in that he does not pay them back in the same coin. He is angry at the ruthless cruelty of the caste Hindus and realises the difference between the Hindus and the Muslims in terms of his own experience when the former turn violent and the latter treat him kindly. The rigid caste system prevalent in the Indian society makes all this difference.

Bakha has done his day's work. He is more clean and tidy than many high caste people. Even Havildar Charat Singh acknowledges this fact when he utters: "Here was a low-caste man who seemed clean. He became rather self-conscious. So here is a young man of eighteen years active and agile who shows surprising efficiency and quickness in doing his job. In the words of the novelist:

He worked away earnestly, quickly, without loss of effort. Brisk, yet steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as a rock when it came into play, seemed to shine forth like glass. He must have had immense pent-up resources lying deep in his body, for he rushed along with considerable skill and alacrity from one doorless latrine to another, cleaning, brushing, pouring phenol. (16)
Such a specimen of mankind and such a useful member of society is surrounded by a pack of the Hindu caste-ridden fanatics who are literally morbid and craven with fear.
Anand makes the reader feel as to what it means to be degraded and dehumanized. It is very important that the reader should experience this encounter of Bakha's degradation with emotional vulnerability because unless he does that, he cannot penetrate into the inside of the protagonist.

Professor Gaston Bachelard of Sonbonne University, is of the opinion in his book Poetics of Space that literature should be experienced not rationalistically but emotionally. In other words, what is important is to experience the Rasas involved in the writings. In this encounter of Bakha, one cannot help but feel the pathetic helplessness of Bakha. One will experience compassion and pity for him. One will also experience rage and indignation against the high caste people, insulting, tormenting crowd which gathers around him. Compared to the crowd lusting to express their superiority, Bakha is a paragon of dignity. Brunton says the same thing that it "is the book's main achievement to show in the person of Bakha, how the human spirit can retain its dignity even when trapped in such degrading circumstances." One cannot help but feel that if it had not been for the intervention of a poor Muslim tonga-wallah, he would have been subjected to thrashing off his life. So, one feels grateful to this intervention and one enjoys the scattering of the crowd in the face of the superior poise of the tonga-wallah.
So far the emotional valencies of the encounter have been dealt with. The idea is to convey through this analysis of the emotions involved in the situation, how unjust and bizarre, how sadistic and pathological is the caste system which can transform a group of normally decent people into a pack of howling wolves, barking dogs and braying donkeys. Besides this, Bakha is not only not getting his money's worth but also his first moment of happiness is marred by public insult. He is even physically assaulted which is most unfortunate. This is in fact, the climax of suffering. The contradictory behaviour of the Lalla who slaps Bakha, becomes quite discernible. He slaps him because he has touched him. But the irony of the fact is that the Lalla cannot slap him without touching him. Bakha cannot hit back because the whole society has made him impotent and inactive.

After the encounter, young Bakha is really not the same. Previously he was a spirited lad and had some hopes and aspirations. For example, he tried to imitate the 'Tommies' way of life and wanted to be like them. He also wanted to read and write. He was carefree and joyful. But now he is a changed man. He realises that he is born only to suffer. He is insignificant in his society. Despite the fact that he is a scavenger of the society, he remains 'unclean' in the eyes of the high caste people.
He finds himself in this dilemma because the curse of untouchability seems to be too complex to be easily removed. He finds himself the severest victim of the caste system and as such feels very much degraded. Obviously, he has life and spirit but it is lying dormant in him like a volcano because of his belonging to the sweeper community. He has rightly been called "a lieop enmeshed in a net" (103) Full of inferiority complex, he hardly dares to talk to people.

In spite of all this, he continues to wander through the city but now he starts announcing his approach "posh, posh, sweeper coming"! (57)

The consciousness of being practically treated as untouchable deadens Bakha to all sense of existence except to the inferiority complex of being an untouchable. Anand ably reveals the mute pain of Bakha's tormented soul. A delicate shade of sarcasm on the haughtiness of the so-called twice-born Hindus also finds expression here in fine artistic terms.

It is interesting to note at this point that Bakha, posh-poshing his way to the city enters narrower streets and dirty alleys. He passes through a filthy, malevolent and darker part of the town. The streets are most unhygienic. But his mind is still busy pondering over the terrible humiliations he suffered earlier in the day.
A bright, busy scene surrounded him where he lingered. The burning inside had emptied his mind of its content and he stood firm, struggling to express each shock as it impinged on his tight-stretched senses. A huge, big-humped, small-horned, spotted old brahmin cow was ruminating with half closed eyes near him. The stink from its mouth as it belched, strangely unlike any odour which had assaulted Bakha's nostrils that day, was nauseating. And the liquid dung which the cow had excreted and which Bakha knew it was his duty to sweep off, sickened him.

Then he is lost in thinking over his plight. He tried to isolate himself from his surroundings but just then he happens to see another scene of dirt and filth:

...a cart came loaded with turnips and carrots and was emptied on to the ground. He stepped forward a few yards hurriedly. But a heap of decaying, rotten vegetables were littered over the baskets here. The putrid stink of this decomposing waste made him hurry away. He stared blankly for a while as he went along, without stirring his eyelids.... He was perspiring. His broad, frank face ordinarily so human, so variable, so changing, with its glistening high cheek-bones, its broad nose, the nostrils of which dilated like those of an Arab horse, his fine full quivering underlip so alive always, was set and impassive, silent, grim and deathly. (59)

For Bakha, this shows the bleakness of the situation.

The street through which he passes is congested with people, different types of shops and mills. He finds dirt and filth everywhere which make him feel disgusted. He is passing through a sort of hell which is literally dirt incarnate. Symbolically it means that the Hindu society is polluted. But instead of dealing with this pollution
directly, the high caste people project it on to the untouchables - Bakha in this case. So, he becomes a scapegoat! Regarded from another angle, the narrow streets and the dirty alleys show that there is no way that Bakha can clean the whole city alone, even though professionally, he is a sweeper par excellence and enjoys his work almost like a karamyogi.

In the words of the novelist:

He [Bakha] worked away earnestly, quickly, without loss of effort. Brisk, yet steady, his capacity for arduous application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. And though his job was dirty, he remained comparatively clean. He didn't even soil his sleeves handling the cosmetics, sweeping, and scrubbing them. 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. It was perhaps his absorption in his task that gave him the look of distinction, or his exotic dress however loose and ill-fitting that lifted him above his odorous world. (147)

After this coming out of the 'inferno' of the city, the aesthetic sense in him gets drawn to the temple upon hearing the conch and the gongs sound coming out of the Hindu temple. Irresistibly and unconsciously as it were, he is fascinated to it. He actually responds aesthetically to the architecture of the temple. Going up the stairs, he is filled with a sense of fear on seeing the grand building of the temple which was really a colossal, huge turreted structure of massive stone and carved masonry, the florid exuberance of whose detailed and intricate decorations struck a strange kind of awe into his being. (62)
Moreover, the fear of numerous Hindu gods and goddesses is also inculcated in Bakha from his very childhood. In spite of this, he cannot help looking into the temple. As is usual, his instinctive fear of being an untouchable grips him when he sees the devotees passing through the courtyard of the temple. He looks at the image of a snake before whom people kneel down; sees the shrine of Hanuman; and the temple of Kali and Krishna about whom he starts thinking. He is torn between two feelings. He wants to have a glimpse of the inside of the temple yet he fears the gods and the society. Notwithstanding he makes an effort to get to the campus of the temple because of his innermost desire to see the various gods there:

The temple stood challengingly before him. He bent down and began to collect the heaps. The unfailing sense of direction of his inner impulse landed him near the steps of the temple again, but now he was afraid. The temple seemed to advance towards him like a monster, and to envelop him....

It is the inherent fear that stops him. It has really paralysed him making him coward. Still he manages to get to the top of the stairs. There in the temple, he finds the various brass images, 'a half-naked priest' and many other 'ritualistic objects'. He feels greatly impressed with the prayer that is going on in the temple:

Bakha was profoundly moved. He was affected by the rhythm of the song. His blood had coursed along the balanced melodic line to the final note of strength with such sheer vigour that his hands joined unconsciously, and his head hung in the worship of the unknown god.
In the meantime, there are shouts—'polluted, polluted'. Obviously, the sanctity of the temple stand desecrated in the eyes of the high caste Hindus even when he is looking inside from the top of the stairs. This makes him stunned and perplexed. He tries to raise himself from the awkward position of prostration, but his limbs had no strength left in them. For a second, he was as if dead. (66) The whole crowd of high caste Hindus in the campus of the temple is rejecting Bakha's presence there. One of the men shouts at Bakha: 'Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down, get away dog!' (67)

Just when he is in a state of ecstasy, euphoria, self-forgetfulness, just when he is 'peaking out' to use the phrase of Abraham Maslow, 11 a veritable hell is let loose on him. In other words, what Mulk Raj Anand is trying to bring home is that because of a series of injustices, Bakha is being deprived of the opportunity of leading a happy life. He has this major encounter with the virtuous, pious, with the hypocritical and the sanctimonious; and this encounter is worse than the previous encounters. It is a veritable nightmare. To add insult to injury, Pt. Kali Charam, a priest of the temple, the representative of the so-called custodians of the Hindu Dharma, exposes himself by attempting to molest Sehni.
While at the village well, the little emaciated priest asks Sohini to sweep the temple courtyard. She with the permission of her father, goes to make the precincts of the temple clean. But the priest misbehaves with her, embraces her and fondles her breasts. Later on, after this incident, Sohini tells her brother Bakha when the latter insists upon telling him the facts: "He e-e- tease me... And then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts." (69) Bakha feels injured, hence he asserts: "Brahmin dog! I will go and kill him!" (69) When Sohini resists the priest's advances on her honour, he in no time, dramatises the situation, creates confusion and misunderstanding among the devotees of the Goddess Kali. They all direct their anger at Bakha—the innocent one. Bakha, in no time loses self-control and is furious. When Sohini tells him about the moral turpitude of the priest. He is on the point of taking revenge from the priest. The words that follow confirm this:

Bakha rushed back to the middle of Courtyard dragging his sister behind him, and he searched for the figure of the priest in the crowd. The man was no longer to be seen, and even the surging crowd seemed to show its heels as it saw the giant stride of the sweeper advance frighteningly towards the temple. Bakha stopped still in his determined advance when he saw the crowd fly back. His fist was clenched. His eyes flared wild and red, and his teeth ground between them to challenge: 'I could show you what that Brahmin dog has done?" (68)
The Brahmin's misbehaviour with Sohini is a great insult to the self-respect of Bakha. Overwhelmed with rage he stood staring at the temple for a moment. There was not a soul to be seen out of doors. All was still. (70)

Looked at psychologically, Sohini is the soul of Bakha. In terms of Bakha's family, his mother is dead, father is no good—a malingerer and younger brother Rakha is a gay blade who is not shouldering his familial responsibilities. Sohini is his special relationship within the family system. It is really interesting to note that upon hearing the story of Sohini's molestation, he becomes violent and moves towards the crowd menacingly and they run helter skelter.

It is again interesting to note that in the previous encounters, he does not take a stand. He allows himself to be humiliated because at stake is only his ego whereas in this encounter, it is his soul which has been violated. After this major incident, Bakha who so far has meekly accepted his state, becomes more self-conscious and wants to understand the whole question of untouchability. In his search of adjustment in the existing system, his father relates his own story but this long story of exploitation and humiliation is not acceptable to Bakha. In spite of his energy and strength of character, he is unable to translate his resolve to revolt against the caste system into action. The reason is that the traditional
 caste barriers ingrained in his unconscious-self stand in his way:

A superb specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like 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 had built up to protect their weakness against him. He could not invade the magic circle which protects a priest from attack by anybody, especially by a low-caste man. So in the highest moment of his strength, the slave in him asserted itself, and he lapse back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances. (71)

Bakha could have taken revenge. His superior physical strength and moral power could have easily overpowered the priest and taught him a lesson of life, but on account of his belonging to the lowest class, he finds himself helpless.

Bakha is in a strange predicament. Even when he carries the boy who is wounded by a stone while playing hockey, his mother instead of feeling obliged to Bakha, abuses him saying that he has polluted her son. So his mental crisis is desperate. He thinks: "I only get abuse and derision wherever I go. Pollution, pollution, I do nothing else but pollute people." (128) Even at home, his father is in the habit of abusing him hysterically on account of which he gets disappointed. The cumulative effect of a succession of humiliating events has made a different Bakha of him. He is so hard-working, dutiful, sincere, yet no one treats him normally. He receives no affection, no sympathy from
any quarter. So frustration and loneliness envelop him.
It is very tragic that he has to live with his wounded self.

Another character in the novel—a Christian priest Colonel Hutchinson whose function is proselytising, tries
to make Bakha confess his sins before him and refers to
Christian virtues. Bakha does not know what sins he has
committed and does not understand what he means by his
sermons. So he feels sore at it. Then Mahatma Gandhi appears
in person in the novel. Bakha happens to hear him. Gandhi
tells the audience that he regards untouchability as the
greatest blot on Hinduism but simultaneously he advises
the untouchables to purify themselves in order to rid
themselves of evil habits like drinking liquor and eating
carrion. Though Bakha does not like everything that Gandhi
says but even then he looks to him like a real champion
of unity among the various sections of Indian society.
Ultimately, he rejects Gandhi in favour of a scientific
solution of the problem of untouchability when he hears the
discussion between R.N. Bashir (B.A. Oxford), Bar-at-Law,
and the poet Iqbalnath Sarshar—the editor of 'Navyug'
that is 'New Era'. As a result, Bakha realises the
importance of the machine in the form of flush-system for
cleaning human dirt. He gets thrilled and becomes optimistic
in regard to better prospects of future. To quote E.M. Forster:
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. Introduce water-closets and main-drainage throughout India, and all this wicked rubbish about untouchability will disappear. 11 (8)

What Anand wants to impress upon us is that mere talking will not do anything to remove the evil of untouchability. Some practical solutions have to be sought and found out to stamp out this baneful curse of Indian society. In this connection, introduction of flush system, according to him, is one of the powerful steps in this direction. Again, to E.M. Forster, the future does seem hopeful for the sweepers on account of this scientific invention:

Bakha returns to his father and 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. 12

What is remarkable about this first novel of Mulk Raj Anand is that he is not making speeches against untouchability but through a selection of certain unpleasant encounters of the main characters is, in fact, making an emotional indictment of the entire Hindu culture. The Indictment may be studied in the following terms:

1. The so-called spirituality and religion which is concerned with bringing people together on the platform of universality, is ridden with the incubus of arbitrary
nations of purity and impurity that divide people into virtual segregation and apartheid.

2. The upper caste Hindus are so unaware that instead of being grateful to the people who take care of the dirt, which they should take care themselves, they see them as dirt.

Bakha tells his father about his bitter experiences when he comes back home at noon. He first relates the episode of the touched man and then refers to Pt. Kali Charan's attempt to molest Sohini. Bakha then burst forth his anger, when advised by his father that he should have been more careful. "But, father, what is the use? ....They would ill-treat us, even if we shouted. They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt." (87)

The indictments against Hindu spirituality and caste system is made not just through the story of Bakha, but also through the related sub-story of Sohini. Another incident indicates the miserable plight of Bakha. He feels much tired and he is therefore very eager for a cup of tea. But there is no water in the pitcher. Sohini willingly goes to the well where she has to wait for long as the outcastes are not allowed to draw water from well. They are at the mercy of the upper caste people. The sweepers and other low caste people have to wait for the arrival of some kind man who may draw out water for them and pour it into their
Pitchers. There is already a crowd at the well when Sohini joins them. She feels depressed and gets worried at the inordinate delay in the arrival of some high caste benefactor. The fact that Bakha is thirsty and tired at home, makes her all the more desperate. Gulabo, the washerwoman, the mother of Ram Charan, a beautiful and a middle aged woman having colourful past, feels inferior to Sohini who is both beautiful and young. She unnecessarily picks up a quarrel with her which is in fact Gulabo’s negative compensation because of her inferiority. Then Pandit Pali Charan, the priest of the town comes. Every low caste person requests him to fill his pitcher. He is a patient of chronic constipation. He does not draw water because he has sympathy with them but because this will move his bowels better. Gulabo and some others try to be the first to get the water. But in the meantime the holy priest’s eye falls on Sohini. He dismisses all others and pours the water into Sohini’s pitcher. She feels much grateful and agrees when he asks her to come to clean his house in the temple compound. And when she goes there, he tries to molest her.

Amanbhere exposes the so-called spirituality and the religiosity of those who are otherwise held in great esteem because of being the custodians of the Hindu Dharma. It is the height of deprivation that such an essential and basic thing as water is denied to the major section of the Indian society.
They cannot have it freely at the time of need. This discrimination on the basis of caste is deplorable and shocking. On the one hand, they are not allowed to go near the well, not to talk of touching a man, while on the other hand, the priest wants to have physical connection with Sohini. Here the novelist directs his anger at the immoral priests and the corruption and immorality of the high caste people trying to expose the hypocrisy of this class. The character of the priest is perhaps distorted to make the reader understand his contemptuous role because of his chronic constipation and weakness. The very fact that he craves for Sohini, shows that the upper caste Hindus need the untouchables for their sexual gratification but not for humane treatment. For them, they do live in their bodies. It is the d\'chotomy in theory and practice that makes the situation all the more ridiculous. In a letter to the present author, Mulk Raj Anand writes:

Underneath the fables there is always a critic of the putrescence, decay, and obsolescence of the half-dead peoples, corroded by inheritance of the Advaita Philosophy, the idea of karma, fatalism, ritualistic hypocrisy and all the many deadnesses. What was sought throughout was to show the struggle of each character, who becomes dimly aware of the deadening to emerge into a fresh human outlook in dynamic relationship of loving with others. In fact, the destiny of each person was suggested as emergent only from sensitive awareness of a new vision of life.
Obviously, Anand is against untouchability because he strongly feels that it is a living putrefaction in the body politic of the Indian society and the Indian psyche. It is a form of deadness, not because it is mean, degrading, dehumanizing, but because it prevents untouchables from adopting a phrase from the above quote: "to emerge into fresh human outlook in dynamic relationship of living with others."

Anand affirms Eros. In Greek philosophy, there are two fundamental principles of life Logos and Eros. Logos is the principle of intellectual discrimination and Eros is the principle of love and relatedness. In terms of Logos, untouchability is a perversion. It flies in the face of rationality and common sense because it reduces a man who is no different from others to the position of a slave, a serf. To speak existentially, it reduces the man who is a subject and moves towards the realms of movement. Every man has inherent dignity that he cannot be robbed of, not even by God. Every man, to speak spiritually, is a spark of the Atman, an Absolute. A society which overvalues a group of people because of their caste and profession and devalues another group of people because of their caste and profession is unjust. So in terms of Logos, the untouchability has no locus standi. But the real danger is done to Eros when Bakha is prevented from relating himself to fellowmen and
from realising his capacity to connect, to relate and to individuate. Bakha with his gifts of head and heart can make a tremendous contribution to his society, enrich the lives of others, but he is prevented from doing so because of his untouchability. He can be an exemplar of certain types of work-ethics. For example, his work-ethics consists of strong sense of duty, energy, dispassion and cleanliness. Veritably, he is presented in the opinion of this writer, as an example of karamyogi. Anand writes that Bakha is a unique worker. He does his work with full concentration, and forgets everything else:

He hardly realised that he had lapsed into activity, so vigorously did he attack his job. And he was completely oblivious during the quarter of an hour, he took to finish a fourth round of the latrines, oblivious alike of the time and of the sweat trickling down his forehead, of the warmth of his body and of the sense of power that he felt as he ended up. (21)

Anand further makes the most impressive statement in the novel:

What a dexterous workman! the onlooker would have said. And though his job was dirty, he remained comparatively clean. . . . A bit superior to his job... not the kind of man who ought to be doing this. 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. It was perhaps his absorption in his task that gave him the look of distinction, or his exotic dress however loose and ill-fitting, that lifted him above his odorous world. (16-7)

When Charat Singh promises Bakha to give him a hockey stick, he becomes all the more active. His enthusiasm with
Which he does his work is remarkable and is praise-worthy.

He enjoys his work very much:

The steady heave of his body from one latrine to another made the whispered refrain a fairly audible note. And he went forward, with eager steps, from job to job, a marvel of movement, dancing through his work. Only, the sway of his body was so violent that once the folds of his turban came undone, and the buttons of his overcoat slipped from their worn-out holes. But this did not hinder his work. He clumsily gathered together his loose garments and proceeded with his business. Bakha broke the tempo of his measured activity to wipe the sweat off his brow with his sleeve. Its woollen texture felt nice and sharp against his skin, but left an irritating warmth behind. It was a pleasant irritation, however, and he went ahead with renewed vigour that discomfort sometimes gives to the body. To him work was a sort of intoxication which gave him a glowing health and plenty of easy sleep. So he worked on continuously, incessantly, without stopping for breath, even though the violent exertion of his limbs was making him gape. (18-9)

With him duty comes first and everything else later.

When Chota asks him to play a game, he refuses him point blank whereas his other friend Ram Charan whiles away most of his time in playing or in useless activities. So Anand has rightly given Bakha the status of a Karamvadi. What is further more damnable about untouchability from the aspect of Brea is that it fills the life of upper caste Hindus with deadness and blight. For example, that old Hindu priest Kali Charan, at the well cannot openly express his appreciation of Sehini’s beauty but he has to resort to subterfuge. The love force in him becomes perverted and contaminated, while on the
other hand, Bakha cannot express his love for Ram Charan’s sister who belongs to washerman’s community which is a bit superior to Bakha’s caste. So on caste grounds, he is unable to marry her. Thus there are castes within castes in the Indian society that act as strong barriers to establish healthy relations among the people of different castes. His imagination runs wild when he thinks of the marriage of Ram Charan’s sister with whom he has played in his childhood. He in fact, wants to marry her but is helpless because of the evil of casteism:

Bakha remembered how, while he had been playing with her brother and Cheta in the barracks, they had come home and started to play at marriage. Ram Charan’s little sister was made to act the wife because she wore a skirt. Bakha was chosen to play the husband because he was wearing the gold-embroidered cap.... There was something wistful about her, a soft light in her eyes, for which she had become endeared to him and for which, he remembered he had actually quarrelled with his friend. (95)

The reminiscences of childhood are in Bakha’s mind. He learns that Gulabe has sold her daughter for two hundred rupees. This makes him sad at heart. The novelist writes:

“He (Bakha) remembered the evening on which he had heard it, for it had been somewhat of a shock to him, and he had felt a sadness in his soul, like a doleful lyric melody.” (96)

The marital relation between Bakha and Ram Charan’s sister perhaps could result in happiness but the social barriers obstructed it. So the Hindu society as it emerges in this novel, and in subsequent novels of Anand because of its
religion, sectarianism, and casteism violate the deepest principle of life, which is Eros. And there is no fulfillment of human instincts, of human needs to love, to belong, to share and participate. One can sin against Logos, but not against Eros. If it is done, it means the destruction of the spring of life.

Untouchability comes in the way of basic communication between man and man. For example, Havildar Charat Singh likes Bakha and his ways but he cannot function properly with him because of it. Though Charat Singh is kind to him, he becomes self-conscious when he finds Bakha in spotless clean clothes. He also understands his sense of industry and efficiency. He knows that he is a good player of hockey. So he promises to give him a new brand hockey stick. He treats him affectionately and allows him certain liberties like going into the kitchen and bringing 'alive' coals to put them into his chilum. He also offers tea to him, though in a pan meant for sparrows to drink water. Charat Singh has an appreciation for Bakha, but due to less of Eros created by the rigid caste system, they cannot function in a proper way with each other. Eros is an entry into 'a new vision of life'.

The psyche of Bakha can be explored from another angle too. The Indian family system functions in terms of roles. According to Maslow, there are inherent self-actualising drives in human beings which mean that human beings want
to actualise their potentials. When a person is prevented from self-actualizing himself because of 'inhibitions, prohibitions, taboos and hindrances in the way of growth',

In psychological language, he becomes neurotic. The self-actualizing drives of Bakha are in the area of knowledge, happiness and the ecstasies. Bakha is not in the wrong when he desires these things but even then, he cannot actualise his wishes. He has to suppress his hunger for beauty and curiosity for learning. There are only a very few persons who like Bakha, are sensitive to beauty, cleanliness and art because most of the people feel indifferent and insensitive to the dirt.

All the events in the novel reveal Bakha's attempt to win an identity which has been denied to his ancestors. His father advises him to pay due respects to the high caste people and always submit to the situation. But Bakha who is the victim of social injustice, deliberate hatred, ill-will, injury or pain as a result of the wrongful treatment meted out to him by the caste Hindus, indignantly tells his father: "I won't go down to the town again. I have done with this job." (87)

Anand gives tremendous psychological depths to his theme of protest. What he points out is, as in the story of Bakha, that when people are deprived of their humanity, their personhood of their existential dignity, the exploiters are traumatizing their consciousness or warping
their psyche. Since consciousness in the psyche functions in the body, the high caste people are wounding their bodies beyond healing. On the one hand, Anand in Apology For Heroism eulogises man but here Bakha is reduced to a crawling worm, virtually a mole in a hole.

Bakha's three peak-experiences are rejected. Anand is really trying to say that the tremendous power of man is not allowed to develop in the Indian society by not allowing him to do things or making his significant contribution. Some people feel less, some more which ultimately is very destructive. Of course, Bakha's problem is to realise himself. It is the characteristic element of Anand's technique that he emphasises the confrontation of the individual with that of social circumstances delineating thus human-destiny underlying his internal and spiritual struggle.

In short, UNPUCHABLE is an important novel of Mulk Raj Anand. It is a great tale of human suffering, epitomised in the protagonist Bakha. With Bakha, the realisation is not negative. He looks forward to light, to the flush-system and therefore to the impending bright future.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

All the quotations from UNTOUCHABLE refer to the edition of Orient Paperbacks, 1970. The pages are given in parentheses.


2. Ibid., p. 6.

3. During the Vedic Times, there was the Varna System and the society was divided into four castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Unfortunately, with the advance of time, both caste and varna began to be regarded as synonyms and caste began to be accepted as divine in nature. Though the orthodox Hindu holds caste to be divine, caste was not known to the Rigveda which distinguished between priests (Brahmins), nobles (Rajans or Kshatriyas), tillers of the soil (Vaishyas), and the slaves (Shudras). (Martindale Don, Social Life and Cultural Change (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1962), p. 180.) Max Weber defines caste thus:

"Caste is undoubtedly a closed-status-group, and castes are communities as distinct from classes which are categories." (Max Weber, Essays in Sociology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970), p. 405.) The general view to-day is that the natives of India were known as Dasas. They were racially different from the Aryans who are said to have come from outside India and invaded the country. The Aryans were white while the natives were dark. After the Dasas or Dasyus were conquered and enslaved, they were called Shudras. Francis Young husband writes: "The custom [Untouchability] had its origin at a time when the Aryan invaders of India had to preserve their community intact as opposed to the original inhabitants of the country. These 'Untouchables' are the remnants of the original inhabitants." (Sir Francis Young husband, Dawn in India (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1948), pp. 271-72.) Karl Marx quoted by


6. M.K. Gandhi's views on untouchability are well-known. Gandhi protested against the British Council award for separate representation for the Scheduled castes, by going on fast unto death. He lived in the colonies of Harijans. He rejected the idea that there is any divine sanction behind it. He once observed: "We are no better than the brutes until we have purged ourselves of the sins we have committed against our weaker brethren." Quoted by Sankara Ghosh, Leaders of Modern India (New Delhi: Allied Publishers (vt.Ltd., 1980), p. 186. Nehru and Dr. Ambedkar too outrightly rejected this evil as something inhuman and satanic.
8. In support of the view already incorporated in the text, the following quotes from Bachelard of Sonbon University are relevant: (1) "The resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence, in the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberation we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet's being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberation's unity of being. Or, to put it more simply, this is an impression that all impassioned poetry-lovers know well: the poem possesses us entirely." (Introduction: The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard, p.xviii). (2) "The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being." (Ibid., p.xix)


10. Scape-goat: In the original sense, Scape-goat was an animal into whom human beings in primitive times, used to transfer their own sins. After the transfer, they resorted to slaughtering the animal ritualistically in order to be free from their own sins. But in the modern sense, the Scape-goat is any person who is sacrificed literally or psychologically, unjustly for achieving one's own ends.

11. Bakha is really 'peaking out' because he is having a sort of inner bliss when he hears the prayer going on in the temple. He devotedly bows his head in reverence of gods. But the Hindu Society is so much degenerated that contrary to all reason, it strips him off all his human dignity by turning him out of the temple premises because of his belonging to the low caste. He is dashed into the trough of worthlessness and despair because of the maltreatment accorded to him by the high caste people.


13. Ibid., p.8.