CHAPTER - II

MULK RAJ ANAND - THE DIALECTICAL IMAGE
Mulk Raj Anand wrote many fictional and non-fictional works relating to social problems of his day. Most critics of his works find an element of leftist undercurrent in Anand’s fiction. His approach to the social malice like untouchability perhaps, made them think that Anand’s humanism is “deeply fringed with Marxism.”

Meenakshi Mukherjee feels that Anand’s ardour for social revolution, and his conviction in salvation through socialistic doctrine are undisguised.

But critics like Srinivasa Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhaiah and M.K. Naik see more of Gandhian humanism and Gandhian moral vision than Marxism in Anand’s works. According to Bama Jha, “It is Gandhian ideas which were based on facts of the Indian situation that appealed to Anand intellectually.”

Granting that all these critics are objective of their appraisal of Anand, we find them approaching Anand’s works with different personal world outlooks. It will be appropriate to know the sort of image of Gandhi that emerges from his writings and also the opinion of Anand himself of his writings and then


evaluate how he views Gandhi in his work *Untouchable*. Anand admits that his impulse to write originated "from the necessity to reform Indian society." Anand uses Gandhian image to drive home its socio-moral significance. He defines his humanism in "PROLEGOMENA TO A NEW HUMANISM," as the "enlightenment in the interest of man true to his highest nature and his noblest vision." We can notice the impact of Gandhi on Anand in defining his humanism. And as such, it stands for "reverent attitude towards the last member of society, towards the weak and the fallen and the underprivileged every where." TALKING about Gandhi Anand says, "The genuineness of his (Gandhi) love for the outcasts moved me more importantly than many of his other ideals." Anand wanted to know the reaction of Gandhi to his novel "UNTOUCHABLE". This urge was inspired partly by sincerity, but partly by the feeling "that the association with a man, whose unorthodox stand against the caste order was respected, would give me the courage to say the awkward things I had myself put down on the paper." as Anand


5 Ibid., p.96-97.


7 Ibid., p. 33.
further explains. He found in Gandhi a champion for the cause which he (Anand) himself was an advocate. Anand was very much impressed by the sincerity of Gandhi in practising what he preached. Invariably during his stay at the Ashram, Anand was drawn towards Gandhi even though he does not agree with the vigorous Gandhian discipline of self. For Anand, Gandhi was an embodiment of moral truth. While depicting the character of Bakha, Anand admits, "the warmth towards Bakha which has made this character loveable to many people, may, to some extent, have emerged from my warmth towards the person of Gandhi."8

But a careful perusal of Anand's UNTOUCHABLE reveals that Anand's interests in and appreciation of Gandhism are limited to Gandhi's love for the downtrodden and the weak. It is clear in the last pages of UNTOUCHABLE that Anand does not have complete trust in Gandhian remedy for the emancipation of untouchables. Anand is more interested in exposing the cruelty and hypocrisy of caste Hindus and the plight of the untouchables in the novel rather than in espousing the cause of Gandhism. That is why Gandhi appears only in the few pages, in about 25 pages in a novel of 175 pages. There also, Bakha, the untouchable, is not shown only Gandhian solution for leading a respectable life in the society.

8 "Indian Literature," p. 33.
Gandhi's remedy is one among the three, the narrator suggests and Anand himself, perhaps, finds it difficult to emphasise which would be more adequate and relevant than the other.

After a day of humiliation, Bakha learns about Gandhi's arrival to the town to address a gathering. There is a surging crowd rushing forward to have a glimpse of Gandhi and Bakha is one among them. No one identifies him as untouchable as he is one among many. So there is no need to Bakha to warn of his presence to other caste Hindus. This very idea of being unrecognised as untouchable makes Bakha happy. He attributes the cause for this situation to Gandhi: "He was in the midst of a humanity which included him in its folds, and yet debarred him from entering into a sentiment, a living, quivering contact with it. Gandhi alone united him with them in the mind, because Gandhi was in every body's mind, including Bakha's. Gandhi might unite them really, Bakha waiting for Gandhi."  

Gandhi, of course, united Bakha with the crowd but only in the mind, that too, unconsciously. If any orthodox Hindu had known this common link between himself and the untouchable Bakha, they would have erased Gandhi, the

connecting link, from their minds for fear of pollution. For Bakha, who has undergone terrible humiliation since morning, the very idea that Gandhi made him share his thoughts with others, is itself a great solace. Naturally Gandhi appears to be a ray of hope in an otherwise gloomy life of Bakha. Gandhi made such an impression on Indians with his sincerity and honesty for the cause of the down trodden "People said he was a saint, that he was an avatar of the Gods Vishnu and Krishna". Anand here refers to the opinions of common folk of Gandhi. But there are some who have doubts on the efficacy of Gandhian movement in driving away the British, "Will he really over throw the government?" asked a rustic. Of course, pat comes a reply in defence of Gandhi, "He has the Shakti to change the whole world," replied a babu. But according to the narrator, that comment has not come out of conviction. It is only what he chewed from the TRIBUNE. For these people, Gandhi represents their own class interests even if they are contradictory. For the same babu, "India has been the privileged home of the world's eternal religion, that teaches how every man and woman, according to their birth and envi-

10 Ibid., p. 153-54.
11 Ibid., p. 154.
12 Ibid., p. 154.
The idea of following one's own Dharma in accordance with one's birth itself negates the lofty aim of removing untouchability of the scavengers. Of course Bakha is not educated enough to find the dichotomy of this orthodox religious sentiments. But not only Bakha, many of Indians did not understand whether Gandhian proposals were practicable and helpful in emancipating them from social evil and economical shackles. For them "Gandhi was a legend a tradition, an oracle". Anand has his own reservations about the efficacy of Gandhian method.

During the national movement the majority of Indians considered Gandhi their Messiah, who was born to deliver them from their sufferings. For untouchables like Bakha, Gandhi was an angel, descended on earth to give them a place of respect in the society. An ordinary village peasant felt that Gandhi could release him from the clutches of village land-lords and their panchayats. So when some one speaks of Gandhi's Idea of conduct of Village Panchayats, a peasant wonders how that would help the poor. Panchayats.

13Ibid., p. 154-55.
14Ibid., p. 155.
whether in free India or British India are the institutions to serve the rich and the powerful. So the Jat peasant questions, "But what about the law suits? The five elders of my village use the Panchayat to wreak vengeance on their enemies, or to bring pressure on the village menials, if they become too independent and I hear Gandhi says we must not go to Sarkari Adalat, but must take up our suits to the Panchayat." It may be argued that these doubts of the peasants are not those of the author. But, certainly they give scope to think that the narrator too harbours certain doubts in regard to Gandhian solution.

Of course the narrator has absolute faith in Gandhi's sincerity for the cause of untouchables. He is sceptical about the efficacy of the Gandhian methods for the eradication of untouchability. Bakha, the untouchable, himself expresses some doubts when he hears that Gandhi was fasting for the sake of bhangis and Chamars. Bakha cannot understand what fasting has to do with the eradication of untouchability. Fasting for Gandhi, may be a method of solving problems but, for the down trodden, fasting is almost thrust on them by their poverty. Bakha feels that Gandhi's fasting may be an expression of his solidarity with them. Bakha wants to say something to Gandhi. But Gandhi is too far from, him physi-

15 Ibid., p. 156.
16 Ibid., p. 156-57.
Gandhi speaks of the emancipation of untouchables. He chastises the caste Hindus for trampling millions of Indians without feeling a slightest remorse for an inequality. Gandhi says that he regards "untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism." He then expresses his love for untouchables in no uncertain terms. "But if I have to reborn, I should wish to be reborn as Untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition." It is this utter simplicity and disinterested affection that charms Anand, the novelist. So is the case with the protagonist in the novel, "Bakha felt thrilled. A tremor went down his spine. That the Mahatma should want to be born as an outcaste! That he should love scavenging! He adored the man. For him he would do any thing." But Bakha with all his adoration for Gandhi, is somewhat sceptical of Gandhian remedy for untouchability. Gandhi argues that in order to emancipate themselves, they have to purify their lives.

17 Ibid., p. 163.
18 Ibid., p. 164.
19 Ibid., 164-65.
They should cultivate the habits of cleanliness, so that no one shall point his finger at them. Some of them are addicted to habits of drinking and gambling, which they must get rid of." Even to innocent Bakha, this remedy appears to be irrational. He is not prepared to own fault for being an untouchable. They have not become untouchables because of their unclean habits. They cultivated unclean habits because they were born untouchables, ill treated and humiliated by the caste Hindus. To the advice of Gandhi, Bakha's reaction is typical of a self respected person, "But now, now the Mahatma is blaming us Bakha felt. 'That is not fair'."  

Gandhi appeals to the good sense of caste Hindus to remove untouchability. This does not stand the test of rationality and practice. There are many socio-economic hurdles that should be overcome to give the untouchable a place of equality in the society. It seems Gandhi has not realised this. He simply exhorts the untouchables not to accept crumbs from the caste Hindus. "They (the untouchables) should now cease to accept leavings from the plates of high-

---

20 Ibid., p. 165.

21 Ibid., p. 165.
Caste Hindus, however clean they may be, represented to be. They should receive grain only—good, sound grain, not rotten grain— and that too, only if it is courteously offered. If they are able to do all that I asked them to do, they will secure emancipation." Gandhi reasoned strangely. This impresses Bakha. He does not realise that he has to take left overs and crumbs from the caste Hindus out of necessity but not out of choice. It will be a question of survival for the low caste people, especially the Harijans, if they reject the grain, whether rotten or not from the caste Hindus. Gandhi’s advice is removed far from reality. Bakha’s longing for respectability makes him forget that they have to suffer hunger if they reject the offerings of the caste Hindus. Gandhi tries to find a solution to the problem of untouchability with in the purview of traditional caste system. Moreover Gandhi asks the untouchable not to fight against social discrimination but to find pleasure in it. He even asks them to be proud of their profession of scavenging. Baser said than done, as Ambedkar, once questioned Gandhi why he did not accept his caste Dharma of a shop keepers, instead of becoming a lawyer.

22 Ibid., p. 165.
Mulk Raj Anand's scientific temper does not allow him to accept these solutions despite his regard for Gandhi. Bakha himself is not sure whether Gandhian solution would be helpful to him. So he has to think over the alternate suggestion made by a poet, who talks of flush system, which relieves the untouchables from scavenging work. Even this is irrational for it is not scavenging work that makes one an untouchable. Of course Gandhi is a rare phenomenon who could mobilise millions during the freedom struggle. But his analysis of social problem has its own limitations. His solutions, even if sincerely shown, has proved futile even in independent India. Anand's Gandhian image is not devoid of flaws, unlike that of Raja Rao's and Bhattacharyas's. Anand was brought up in a different social environment and his stay abroad and western education gave him a different social concept which is completely different from that of the above two novelists.

Anand's protagonist Bakha represents Anand's views in the novel. Gandhi remained an enigma even to Anand, as he did to many educated Indians. Bakha fails to understand the Gandhian concept of untouchability. He feels it incompatible with the actual prevailing social conditions. Bakha, like Anand, has absolute regard for Gandhi's love for the
untouchables and sincerity in taking up their cause. What Gandhi appears to lack is a proper understanding of the disease of untouchability and its cause. Balarama Gupta rightly points out, "the caste system and Karma theory are complementary doctrines, both in a sense equally satanic devices of man to subject a part of the community to eternal subjugation and humiliation. It's monstrous to think that men like Bakha suffer in the world inevitably because of their Karma."23

Gandhi has faith in the theory of Karma and Swadharma, while his concept of Varnasrama Dharma, in reality perpetuates the oppression of lower castes, he tries to find means to eradicate untouchability within that very system. Gandhi's pleading to the untouchables to derive pleasure from their profession i.e., scavenging and bear the humiliation with dignity does not appear to be rational. It is like asking a hungry man to seek pleasure in hunger as he is freed from indigestion. Balaram Gupta rightly points out, "It is equally preposterous to plead that they must endure suffering in order that they may merit better deal in their next births. A little unprejudiced reasoning reveals that this is all abracadabra, ingenuously invented by high caste Hindus to keep untouchables from any possible revolt and to safeguard their own self imposed exalted position."24


24 Ibid., p. 29.
This is not to impute motives to Mahatma's concern for the untouchables. But the proposals he makes to eradicate untouchability do not even though the fringe of the problem. Anand's rational mind does not appear to digest Gandhi's orthodox ideas and irrational proposal. Yet the image of Gandhi that comes out of this novel is that of a honest man whose sincere concern for the welfare of untouchables which appeals to all. Even if Gandhi is not shown as the sole Messiah to eradicate social evils in Indian society, it is the love and warmth that emanate from Gandhi that impressed Anand to give us a lovable image of Gandhi. Gandhi's concern for untouchables is like the concern of a mother bird, which tries to protect her offspring from the insults and humiliations they are subjected to, by the upper caste Hindus. But he does not probe deep into the roots of the problem. It appears, he simply applies a balm to soothe the suffering minds. That is why, the plight of the untouchables has not been changed to better even after 42 years of independence and Gandhian message that is said to be propagated by the successive governments. As N. Radhakrishna aptly points out, "Gandhi fought to remove it (untouchability). But Gandhi's India has not changed considerably despite all the bravado and her protests against racial discrimination in other countries. The
Thus Anand's Gandhi is a man of utmost simplicity and his affection for the downtrodden is really enamouring. But, despite his sincere concern, the solutions he projects fail miserably to help the needy and helpless. Anand, thus, is not blind to the limitations of Gandhian ideology.