


Manual Scavenging and the Issue of Untouchability in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

P. Gopika Unni

Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, India

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7604-2480>

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:

ENG-2020-09013302

Volume: 9

Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2020

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 30.06.2020

Accepted: 05.09.2020

Published: 01.12.2020

Citation:

Gopika Unni, P. "Manual Scavenging and the Issue of Untouchability in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2020, pp. 32-34.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v9i1.3302>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Abstract

Untouchability is an evil social menace, where certain group of people are discriminated or alienated based on their caste, class or job from the mainstream sections of the society. Untouchables are the most oppressed and marginalized people, who often lack right and voice in the public domain. Manual scavenging is considered or treated as a job attributed to the untouchables of lowest strata of the society. These people are not given any dignity due to their job of carrying human waste using their bare hands. Mulk Raj Anand presents the sufferings and hardships of an untouchable boy named Bakha as a manual scavenger faced in the casteist society through his well known novel Untouchable.

Keywords: Untouchability, Manual scavenging, Castiest society, Marginalized, Class bias, Casteism

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation says that "My fight against untouchability is a fight against the impure in humanity."

Untouchables or Dalits are the fifth Varna apart from the four Varnas. They are called as the outcastes and the most downtrodden people. They are considered as the Avarnas and the four other Varnas are called as the Savarnas.

Untouchables are treated as impure based on their fifth Varna as well as due to their menial jobs. Untouchables are given the menial jobs of manual scavenging, burial of dead etc. Untouchability is an evil practice of discrimination a section of people based on their caste and class. The high class people avoid contact with this outcaste people as the mere touch of this untouchables make the Savarnas polluted. Also there exists a belief that people of higher castes could become impure even if a shadow of an untouchable person touches him and in order to re-gain his purity he had to take a dip into holy waters of the Ganga.

Mulk Raj Anand is known as the Charles Dickens of Indian writing. He is also one of the four pillars of the Indian Literature in English. Other three writers are Raja Rao, R.K Narayan and Ahmed Ali. Mulk Raj Anand focuses on the sufferings and poverty of the low class people in the society. His famous works are *Untouchable* (1935), *'Coolie'* (1936), *'The Village'* (1939), *'The Sword and the Sickle'* (1942), and *'The Big Heart'* (1945; rev. ed. 1980).

Mulk Raj Anand's most acclaimed novel *Untouchable* exhibits the true shades of untouchability and the sufferings of a manual scavenger faced in this casteist society. This novel revolves around the live story of a boy named Bakha, who belongs to the Bhangi class of manual scavengers. He is not interested in manual scavenging but his father Lakha forced him to do the job for their livelihood. Mulk Raj Anand also presents other four characters such as Bakha's brother Rakha, his sister Sohini, the priest and Colonel Hutchingson to depict the issue of untouchability to its extreme.

The issue of a class bias within the Untouchables is well evident from an incident where Sohini gets verbally abused from a washerwoman named Gulabo for fetching the water from the public wells. Also the Untouchables are not allowed to fetch water from the well directly and they have to wait until a person belonging to high caste offers them water from the well. Also Untouchables are not allowed to enter the temples, as temples are for the high castes. Pundit Kali Nath, the priest tries to abuse Sohini sexually and he later accuses her in front of the people for intentionally touching him. Sohini explains that Pundit Kali Nath has tried to touch her, which infuriates Bakha. He spats on him in rage for abusing his sister and cursed the evil of Untouchability. Here Anand presents the condition of an Untouchable girl, who faces subjugation and sexual abuse from the high castes. Another character whom Anand brings is Colonel Hutchingson, who converts the Untouchables to Christianity. He makes an attempt to convert Bakha into a Christian and later failed. Also Hutchingson's wife also abuses Bakha by calling him as "Blackie", which makes him more sad.

Even though Mulk Raj Anand was a Gandhian follower, he tries to bring a modernized concept through this novel other than the Gandhian ideologies for the eradication of Untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi put forward three objectives as a rebel against Untouchability. They are the Untouchables should not accept the left overs of the food from anyone and should not indulge in playing games like gambling and should give up the habit of drinking. Anand proposes a modernized solution through other two characters named a poet and a Muslim man for the eradication of manual scavenging, that is the flush system.

Manual Scavenging is considered to be a dirty job as well as inhumane too, where the scavengers have to collect the human waste using their bare hands. And those scavengers are also marginalized from the main stream based on their menial job. Flush system is a modernized solution to eradicate as well as to save the poor out caste people from this evil practice of Untouchability. This novel can also be compared to Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai's ThottyudeMakan, which also revolves around the issue of manual scavenging.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel named Untouchable presents the hardships, oppression, marginalization and Untouchability faced by a manual scavenger in a caste society. This novel can be considered as a weapon to change the social system or hierarchical structure so that the Dalits or the out-caste people will also enjoy the equal right and freedom in the society.

References

- Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*, Arnold Publishers, 1984.
- Bayly, Susan. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Bhasin, Agrima. "Washing Off this Stain Will Need More." *The Hindu*, 2012.
- Cohen, Stephen Philip. *India: Emerging Power*. Brookings Institution Press, 2001.
- Corbridge, Stuart and John Harriss. *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy*. Polity Press, 2000.
- Cowsajee, Saros. "Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable - An Appraisal." *Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand*, 1982.
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, compiled by Vasant Moon, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014.
- Fowler, Jeaneane. *Hinduism: Beliefs and Practices*. Sussex Academic Press, 1997.
- Jaiswal, Suvira. "Some Recent Theories of the Origin of Untouchability; A Historiographical Assessment." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 39, no. I, 1978, pp. 218-229.
- Kotek, Ruthie. *Untouchables of Korea or: How to Discriminate the Illusive Paekjong?*. University of Haifa, 2009.
- Kumar, Ravinder. "Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona Pact, 1932." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1-2, 1985, pp. 87-101.
- Moreland, W.H. *Relation of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Halyukt Society, 1931, p. 78.
- Moreland, W.H. *Relation of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Halyukt Society, 2016.

- Moreland, W.H. *Relation of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*. Halyukt Society, 1931.
- Mukherjee, Prabhati. *Beyond the Four Varnas: The Untouchables in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 2002.
- Paik, Shailaja. "The Rise of New Dalit Women in Indian Historiography." *History Compass*, vol. 16, no. 10, 2018.
- Passin, Herbert. "Untouchability in the Far East." *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1955, pp. 247-267.
- Pinto, Sarah. *Where There Is No Midwife: Birth and Loss in Rural India*, Berghahn Books, 2013.
- Smith, David. "Hinduism." *Religions in the Modern World Traditions and Transformations*, edited by Woodhead, Linda, et al., Routledge, 2016.
- "The 'untouchable' Indians with an unenviable job". *The Independent*, 2010.
- Thorat, Amit and Omkar Joshi. "The Continuing Practice of Untouchability in India: Patterns and Mitigating Influences." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2020.
- Walters, Vicky. "Parenting from the 'Polluted' Margins: Stigma, Education and Social (Im) Mobility for the Children of India's Out-Casted Sanitation Workers." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2019, pp. 51-68.

Author Details

P. Gopika Unni, *Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, India*,
Email ID: gopikaunni3333@gmail.com