

# The Relevance of Mulk Raj Anand and Bama's Solutions of the Problem of Unouchability

## Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand and Bama have both tried to present a realistic picture of their contemporary societies respectively. Former was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and latter by Ambedkar. Anand presents the plight and miseries of an untouchable of north India while she depicts her personal experience as an untouchable of south India. Both try to suggest solution to the bane of untouchability. Present critique aims at discussing the relevance of their solutions and their limitations. Though the times have changed and many people of urban areas might not even have any idea of the prevalence of untouchability in India but the fact remains that in the remote countryside it is practiced with same impunity and without any compunction. Present paper tries to discuss: Why this abominable and inhuman system of caste has not been rooted out? How can it be eliminated?

**Keywords:** Untouchability, Abominable, Limitations, Humanity, Misdeeds

## Introduction

A scholar said that very fate of India was doomed the day they coined the term Mallechha or untouchable. In no culture of the world do we find people hate so much their fellow human beings as here in the Indian culture. It is against the very fundamentals of humanity that people should hate their fellow beings not for any other reasons or for their misdeeds but just because they are born in a particular community. The problem of untouchability or casteism has haunted the Indian minds since times unknown. People have practiced it as natural and God gifted. The scriptures of Hindus have spewed venom against the low birth people. The Smritis deny them any rights; the right to education; the right to own property; the right to a decent and honorable living to say in brief has been snatched from them.

A whole range of reformers, saints, political thinkers has worked on these problems to remove them

In the same line fall the two authors Mulk Raj Anand and Tamil writer Bama particularly their work 'Untouchable' and 'We too are Human Beings' respectively. Anand takes up the issue in his work 'untouchable' through the main protagonist Bakha in the years of 1930s when the technological advancement has not been so much. He suffers humiliation at the hands of caste Hindus that made him shout of his approach so that the upper caste people may be safe from any possibility of being polluted by his touch. The novel depicts a day in the life of an untouchable through stream of conscious technique portraying his cogitations, fears and all psychological weaknesses that centuries of oppression have brought to him. His desire to see the interior of the temple is met by a cry- polluted! Polluted! Polluted! The priests shout at him:

"Get off the steps; scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service. Now we will have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away dog". Scene 6 (In the Temple) 1. Though temple doors have been opened to the untouchables and the evil of untouchability has vanished in this form in the cities with the spread of education and technological development. But in the remote rural areas some sort of untouchability still continues as the caste Hindus here are still obsessed with idea of keeping the ancient traditions intact. They criticize the young people for mixing with their low caste peers. On the public places it is not possible to observe untouchability now the way it was in old times when the machine age was not so much overwhelming but in private life it is still rampant. Many people still would not allow the low caste laborers to eat in their utensils or sit on their chairs or cots. Even today farmhands or cowherds of low caste would dine sitting on the ground in a corner of their masters' house courtyards.

Mahatma Gandhi in his speech in the novel expresses his sympathy for the untouchables – the victims of this sordid practice that occur in the



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novel. He goes on to mention that even in the ashram he has employed a Brahmin boy to do the job of cleaning the toilets and sweeping.

The boy is a daily reader of the 'Gita' and faithfully says his prayers. And he actually wants to set an example for the sweepers in the ashram.

However this can not be said to be a solution as the Brahmin boy does the task of cleaning the toilets just to set an example for the sweepers. In a way this idea is very dangerous as it does not aim at removing untouchability but rather at making them do the job of cleaning the toilets and fecal material honestly' efficiently and without any grudge. Well known Tamil critic and thinker 'Ranganayakamma' observes about this famous speech that Anand has included in the novel:

"The cleaning of the Hindu society should be done by the Hindus; why should the non Hindus clean it? Why should the responsibility of cleaning the latrine of all the people in the society be on a single caste? Did this Mahatma (great soul) see no injustice in it? Gandhi says that the Brahmin boy is doing the work of sweeping so that he might give the ashram sweeper opportunity to 'do his work well'. P-163) 2

Gandhi goes on to say that he does not want to be reborn but if there is a possibility of his being reborn he must be born as a Hindu (not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra) but as an untouchable in order that he might endeavor to free himself and the untouchables also. But this type of mentality will only make the dalits dependent on a caste Hindu. The desire for rebirth for the upliftment of a section of society reflects the Hinduist philosophy of avatars. And Gandhi's views also suggest that the untouchables can not get rid of this curse themselves.

There is no lack of philosophers and reformers who blame the untouchables themselves for their plight and put the responsibility of getting rid of it on them. Gandhi too in his speech says that the sweepers should drop the bad habits like gambling and drinking; and that they should remain neat and clean. What on earth could Anand imply such an idea as Pandit Kali Nath's attempt to molest Bakha's sister Sohini suggests that the untouchability is merely an idea of mindset. Sohini for the Brahmin is an object that can be relished. However when Sohini protests the despicable Pandit blames that he himself has been polluted by the accidental touch of a low caste girl.

Nevertheless hypocrisy of caste Hindu middle class is to well known to need any lengthy discussions. They want to use and exploit the untouchables the way they like. The religion is a powerful weapon in their hands. The only solution for their deliverance is their economic self-reliance.

The conversion to Christianity is another alternate Bakha is offered. But his admiration for Colonel Hutchinson's religion comes to a heartbreaking end when he senses contempt in Mrs. Hutchinson's words. She chides her husband for his involvement with the low caste people calling them 'Bhangis' and 'Chamars'. Bakha has learnt that the hatred of heart can not be removed by any religion of the world. We too have learnt from experience that the condition of untouchables who converted to Christianity is not much better. Same humiliation haunts them; same

exploitation grinds and same destiny is in store for them. Arundhati Roy's novel 'The God of Small Things' presents the plight of pariah Christian 'Velutha' who is murdered ruthlessly for having an affair with a high caste Christian girl.

The example of Bama a Tamil Dalit writer from a Roman Catholic family is also relevant. In her autobiographical short story included in the NCERT prescribed curriculum book for 10+2, 'Vistas' taken from her book "Karukku"--- 'We too are Human Beings' she presents a soul scorching experience that she had as a child. On the way back from school to home she saw that a landlord was sitting on a platform and the people of her caste were busy working hard for him. She was quite amused to see an old man of her street fetching a packet of eatables holding it by a string. In order to keep it away from his body he was walking in a funny manner. When she told the incident to her brother 'Annan' he was hurt deeply and told Bama that the old man was not being funny. He was walking in that manner to avoid any possibility of touching the packet because everybody thought that they were untouchable and their touch could pollute them. Bama was furious to learn it. She wanted to touch those eatables. Her brother consoled her and told her that only way to get ride of the sordid situation was to work hard and study assiduously. Later in the story Bama observes:

"The words that Annan spoke to me that day made a very deep impression on me. And I studied hard, with all my breath and being, in a frenzy almost. As Annan had urged, I stood first in my class. And because of that, many people became my friends". P-99)3

Here Bama seems to suggest that the untouchables themselves are to blame for their misery. If they get good education the problem will be solved automatically. What solution is enough for those dalits who can not do well in the field of education? Does she mean that it is okay if such people live in misery? Even highly educated untouchables are also not given much respect and are discriminated against in public offices and looked down upon as soon as their caste is known.

What both Bama and Mulk Raj Anand fail to understand and overlook is the fact that caste question or the question of untouchability is basically the question of division of labor. Those castes that do lowest type of manual labor are at the lowest step of caste hierarchy. Carl Marx in his book 'Capital' Volume1 (1867) Renowned critic and thinker Ranganayakamma observes

"Marx and Engels observed that the crude form of division of labor found among Indians called caste system in their state and religion.... 'Thus for Marx caste system was also a particular division of labor. In the other words division of labor created castes. However the division of labor is hereditary in nature' P-34]4

Actually only solution for the problems of casteism and untouchability is the inter-caste marriage and such marriages are possible only when the couples are highly educated and have strong economic background. Economic stability has failed Indian masses for centuries. The policies of reservation and stipends have not done any much

good to the society. The majority of dalits still reel under back breaking labor. In the capitalistic mode of production the liberty of masses is like a day dream. Only the end to the existence of personal property can bring equality in all fields of life. Hardly any solution is sufficient to raise their economic standard but only a system based on collective ownership on the means of production can bring economic equality among the people which will guaranty social equality for dalits. If only a small percentage of dalits reach high position that would bring no change in the destiny of dalit masses. Because that small number of people is co-opted by the system and becomes a part of it. To conclude in Marxist thinker Ranganayakamma's words

"Not only in the case of so called love marriages but also in the case of inter-caste marriages arranged by reformist parents, marriages take places only when educational and economic levels match..... Even if Dalits take up any number of positions such as The Prime-minister, The Chef-Minister, the President..... Just as upper caste poor remain as before during the rule of the upper caste rich, the poor of the Dalit castes will also remain as before under the rule of Dalit leaders". P-102,103) 5

#### References

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