

CHAPTER 3

UNTOUCHABLE: THE RUTHLESSNESS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

I believe in the struggle – the struggle of man to free themselves and to expand freedom to others to sustain the ever expanding areas of consciousness, to make man truly human. (Anand, 1986, p. 25)

Introduction:

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of the evils of untouchability as observed in Anand's first literary endeavour *Untouchable* (1981). The untouchables were barely treated as human because of their livelihood which was regarded polluting and unclean. The untouchables basically worked with the leather or cleaned human excreta. They were unable to live a life of freedom because in every walk of their life they faced severe social impediments. They were not allowed to draw water from the village wells nor were they allowed to enter into any temple. They had to live separately away from the living areas of the upper caste Hindus for fear of polluting them. The upper caste members of the society did not take any food items or even water from the untouchables. If any untouchable accidentally touched an upper caste Hindu, the caste Hindu would be required to go through purification rituals. The untouchables had to live a life of seclusion, segregating themselves from the normal day-to-day life of the society. They accepted their lot, regarding it as their sins of past lives. In fact, they complied with the norms of the society without making any visible disagreement. It is against such a background, Mulk Raj Anand made an untouchable the protagonist of his novel *U*. Discussion of the novel in this chapter shall be made keeping the main

argument of the thesis in minds. Further, the novel shall be analysed on the basis of the prevailing norms of the society regarding untouchability and how Anand's characters in the novel reacted or showed their resentments against it.

Anand passed his early childhood in army cantonment as his father worked in the British Indian Army. Inside the cantonment, he befriended many lower caste boys- who were sons of low caste people like scavengers, cobblers, washermen, bandsmen etc. Of course, Anand's mother was unable to tolerate such friendship with the untouchables. But, he went on continuing with his friendship with them. Amongst such untouchable friends, he was fascinated by the talent of an untouchable boy. This untouchable boy showed his variegated talent in different fields which was quite unusual. The boy was a wonderful singer as well as an able sportsman. Anand was quite impressed by his talent. But as the boy was an untouchable, his talent remained hidden from the outside world. In fact, the untouchable boy could not dream of excelling in his skill. His fate was painful and frustrating for young Anand. It was unacceptable for Anand and he regarded it an injustice done to the untouchable boy. For many years, Anand was disturbed by the boy's fate as he could not reconcile with, "the contradiction between the inborn qualities of this youth and the down and out status to which he was condemned" (Anand, 1968, p. 6). In England, when he decided to try his hand in writing novels, this lingering sense of injustice done to the untouchable boy prompted him to make him the protagonist of his novel *U*. His attempt of writing his first novel on that untouchable boy was as if to satisfy his deep rooted desire of doing something for that untouchable boy who was much wronged by the caste-ridden society. When he was able to complete the novel *U*, Anand said that it had "thrown off the weight of

centuries, hidden feeling of oppression, disgust and horror against insults, off one's chest" (Anand, 1968, p. 8).

A Brief Outline of the Novel:

In *U*, Anand portrays a day in the life a sweeper boy whose name is Bakha. The novel is about Bakha's gradual self-realisation of his caste and the stigma of untouchability associated with it. Bakha lives in the outcaste's colony outside the town of Bulandshahr. In the mud-walled houses of the colony, lived the outcastes: "the scavengers, leather workers, washermen, barbers, water-carriers, grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society" (Anand, 1981, p. 11). The colony was totally unhygienic to live in because it lacked drainage system, lanes were covered with donkey, sheep, horse, cow and buffalo dung, and the air is filled with the odious smell of hides and skins of dead carcasses. Bakha lived his simple life with his brother Rakha, his sister Sohini and his father Lakha who was the Jemadar of all the sweepers. Because of his old age, Lakha stopped his work of latrine cleaning, and left it for his eighteen year old son Bakha. Bakha's family lived in a very unhygienic condition in a small and dark cottage. His father Lakha accepted the caste realities without any protest. But Bakha found it hard to understand why he couldn't get due respect as a human being in spite of working very hard all day long from the dawn to the dusk. He was fascinated by the manners of the Tommies as they treated him amiably. He also had fondness for his friend as they called him as 'Pilpali Shahib' due to his English attire.

As a scavenger, Bakha was efficient and quick in his work. The havildar Charat Singh liked Bakha's alacrity of latrine cleaning. He praised Bakha and promised to give him a hockey stick as reward. Bakha's sister Sohini had very attractive physical features,

following which she faced many injustices because of her young age and attractiveness. Bakha and his sister Sohini were destined to suffer from various unfair treatments from the caste ridden society because of their ancestral work of scavenging. One day, he accidentally touched a high-caste Hindu for which he was insulted and beaten. Then, his sister Sohini also faced an attempt of molestation by the village priest Pundit Kali Nath at the temple on the pretext of helping her. Bakha was helpless because he was aware of the fact that he could do nothing. When he went for the customary begging trip to have food items, a high caste Hindu woman threw down a piece of bread to Bakha from the balcony of her house.

Such inhuman treatment and humiliations were really intolerable for Bakha. He went on facing them without any complaint but it burned his inner being considerably. He faced the humiliation without any complaint but inwardly he burned in fury. His frustration was unlimited because of the insults he faced throughout the day. He was sad and heartbroken. He met the Salvation Army chief Colonel Hutchinson who asked him to come to the church to pacify his disturbed mind. But Colonel Hutchinson's soothing words were ineffective in pacifying his indignation at the society. Later, he went to Golbagh where he got the chance to listen to Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's embalmng words uttered in support of the untouchables were really thrilling for Bakha. He was fascinated by the support Mahatma promised for the untouchables. But his anguished heart was pacified when the poet Iqbal Nath Sarashar mentioned the modern invention of flush system in latrines. At last, Bakha became hopeful of finding a solution to the curse of his low birth with the advent of scientific flush system.

Social Discontent and Subdued Spirit of Rebellion in *Untouchable*:

In *U*, the central character Bakha was dissatisfied with his life from the very beginning. Time and again, he had been expressing his discontent towards the inhuman treatment meted out to him and his fellow beings. He was an untouchable, but at the same time, he was a jovial young man with all the characteristic dreams and wishes. Unlike his fellow untouchables, he never learnt to see himself as an untouchable. He wanted to be a Babu because his uncle told him about the life style of a Babu. Sometimes, he was fascinated by the British sepoy and tried to imitate them by living like them or dressing like them. All the trials and tribulations of life made him aware of his untouchable status in the society. It was the grim reality of being an untouchable which haunted him like anything. His sufferings made him strong, but at the same time, it also made him aware of the difficulties of an untouchable. He realised that his caste would never let him live a free life and he was to carry the baggage of discontent throughout his entire life.

Bakha's predicament in the caste ridden society of India was the driving force of the actions of the novel. The reader is made to look at the bleak world of Bulandshahr through the perspectives of Bakha and occasionally through his old ailing father Lakha. In *U*, Bakha became the prototype of the untouchables. Anand's delineation of Bakha is clear and sympathetic. In this regard, E. M. Forster remarked:

Untouchable could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about

has troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity. (Anand, 1981, p. 9)

In *U*, Anand is critical about the prejudices of ossified Hindu society regarding the treatment meted out to the untouchables. Forster could not resist himself from expressing the following:

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 outcastes from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it. (Anand, 1981, p. 8)

Anand understood the psychology of the upper caste Hindus as he was also one amongst them. They were proud of their class superiority over the other castes from the ancient times. In this regard he said: “The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the two upper castes in Hindu society, justify their superiority by asserting that they have earned their position by the good deeds of multiple lives” (Anand, 1981, p. 17). For these upper castes, untouchables were non-existent for cultural mix-up. They were regarded as subhuman beings, treated with cruelty, and exploited ruthlessly. They refused to accept the untouchables as human beings, ignored them, bullied them and exploited them at will.

The protagonist of the novel, Bakha had to face numerous difficulties in society due to his caste. He was totally oblivious of the stigma of untouchability and so he wanted to live his life to the brim. He had an indomitable desire to play hockey and when Havildar Charat Singh offered to give him a hockey stick he was overjoyed. He was

full of gratitude and characteristic servility of a slave was observable in him. He showed: “the weakness of the down-trodden, the helplessness of the poor and the indigent suddenly receiving help, the passive contentment of the bottom dog suddenly illuminated by the prospect of fulfillment of a secret and long cherished desire” (Anand, 1981, p. 20). The untouchables accepted their humiliating position without any apparent show of dissatisfaction. They were censored through out the ages. Such censorship often put indelible impressions on their body and mind. Therefore, Forster remarked: “The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape” (Anand, 1981, p. 8). In the novel, the betel-leaf seller flings the packet of cigarette at Bakha because he was an untouchable. The betel-leaf-sellers action was like: “a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop” (Anand, 1981, p. 48).

Son of a scavenger, Bakha was destined to clean dung. He lived near dung all his life. The untouchables were doomed to suffer in perpetual untouchability. They were also not aware of any let out from this trap leading to their endless social ostracism. Most of the untouchables accepted their miserable lot without making any protest. Bakha’s father Lakha was one such untouchable who was unable to think of changing his lot of facing inhuman treatment from the upper caste Hindus. Bakha was inexperienced, so he was unable to tolerate the humiliation he received from the high caste Hindus. His sister Sohini went to the village well to fetch water for him. But she had to wait for a kind-hearted high caste Hindu helping her in filling her pitchers because untouchables were not allowed to draw water from the well. The public well was crowded with untouchables waiting for their turn to fill their pitchers. In this regard Anand remarked:

“if they were to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream” (Anand, 1981, p. 26). Facing such humiliating treatment, the untouchables could never think of a dignified life in the society where they had been living.

As a jovial young boy, Bakha wanted to go to school because he wanted to become a sahib but his father did not fulfill his wish. His father told him: “schools were meant for the babus, not for the bhangis” (Anand, 1981, p. 45). It was later when he could understand the reason of his father’s refusal to send him to school. It was really pathetic for him to understand that:

He was a sweeper’s son and could never be a babu. Later still he realized that there was no school which would admit him, because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of a sweeper’s son. (Anand, 1981, p. 45)

Then in the town, Bakha faced terrible humiliation and physical abuse when he accidentally touched an upper caste Hindu in the street. The man created a scene because he was polluted by Bakha’s touch. In anger, he slapped Bakha on the face undoing his turban. Bakha was spell bound at such an atrocity:

He stood aghast. 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 cumulated strength of his giant body glistened in him with the desire for revenge, while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame. (Anand, 1981, p. 57)

But there was no scope of revolt for the untouchables. He could have fled away from the scene but he did not do so because such an action on his part would have created much disturbances. Many upper caste men who surrounded him would have been defiled by his touch:

...he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. (Anand, 1981, p. 54)

After this incident, the bitter reality dawned upon Bakha, and most pathetically he treaded on the road shouting at the pedestrian cautioning them about his approach: “Posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, and posh, posh sweeper coming!”(Anand, 1981, p. 57). Such inhuman abuses and humiliations were familiar occurrence for the untouchables. But for Bakha it was new and so he could not reconcile such treatment and a faint shade of rebellion was observable in him. His introspection in this regard was indeed heart touching:

They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That’s why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines everyday. That’s why they don’t touch us, the high-castes. (Anand, 1981, p.58)

Later, in a show of defiance he entered into the temple which he was unable to think of earlier. There was curiosity in his heart regarding the temple because he never in his life

entered in to a temple. His determination was like that of a murderer in his attempt to enter into the temple. But such courage on his part was momentary, because:

...he soon lost his grace in the low stoop which the dead weight of years of habitual bending cast on him. He became the humble, oppressed underdog that he was by birth, afraid of everything, creeping slowly up, in a curiously hesitant, cringing movement. After he had mounted the first two steps, he stood completely demoralized with fear and retreated to the place from which he had started. (Anand, 1981, p. 66)

There was more surprise waiting for him when he met his sister Sohini, who told him how the temple priest Pundit Kali Nath attempted to molest her. Pundit Kali Nath claimed himself to be a Brahmin belonging to the highest rank of the caste hierarchy but he could descend himself to the lowest level by attempting to molest an untouchable girl Sohini, Bakha's sister. Physically and mentally he was not fit to cohabit with a woman, but he was "brazened by the authority he exercised over the faithful and the devout" (Anand, 1981, p.33). He ogled at her as he was sure that he could do anything with Sohini without having the risk of any punishment. On learning about this misadventure of Pundit Kali Nath, Bakha was enraged and he even threatened to kill him. "I will go and kill him" (Anand, 1981, p. 71). But his rage was limited only to his thinking to taking revenge on the dishonest Pandit. It was only a verbal threatening. He was unable to attempt physical violence because he could not overcome the psychological barrier created by thousand years of oppression:

He could not overstep the barriers which the conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weaknesses against him. He could not invade the magic

circle which protects a priest from attack by anybody, especially a low-caste man. So in the highest moment of his strength, the slave in him asserted itself, and he lapsed back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances. (Anand, 1981, p. 73)

It was a pathetic condition for Bakha. He wanted to take revenge but he could not because he was shackled by an abstract intangible power. It was a psychological barrier which restrained him to go against the high caste Hindus. To say it precisely: “serfdom of thousands of years had humbled him” (Anand, 1981, p. 73).

Bakha and his family members were surviving on the left over foods given to them by the wealthy upper caste Hindu families. They used to collect left over food items from the upper caste Hindu households and from army barracks. His sister Sohini used to do that in the silversmith’s lane. But on the day when she was molested by Pundit Kali Nath, Bakha decided to do that work for his family. It was really humiliating to collect food by crying loudly: “Bread for the sweeper, mother. Bread for the sweeper” (Anand, 1981, p. 76). Unfortunately, in this activity also Bakha faced derision and abuse for polluting the place by resting on the doorstep of an upper caste Hindu household. The woman of the house vilified him:

Why did you sit down on my doorstep, if you had to sit down at all? You have defiled my religion! You should have sat there in the gully. Now I will have to sprinkle holy water all over the house. Spoiler of my salt! Oh, how terrible! (Anand, 1981, p. 81)

Then, she flung the bread to him from the top of her house as she didn’t like to come down. As ill luck would have it, the pancake fell down on the brick pavement of the

gully. Such behaviour was insulting and it eroded his self-esteem. Later, he muttered: “I shouldn’t have picked up that bread from the pavement” (Anand, 1981, p. 84). His mind and soul really suffered from great damage due to this type of insult and humiliation.

After these incidents, he was crestfallen and he wanted to discuss his ordeals with somebody. When his father sympathetically asked him about the reason of his indolence, he told him every thing. He was full of discontent regarding the manners of the upper caste Hindus. His father’s response was not supportive to alleviate his anguish. Lakha was worldly wise as life made him experienced enough and so he inquired how such an incident could happen. Repeatedly he asked his son whether he shouted customarily about his approach while treading on the road. When he learnt all about the incident, Lakha asked him not to show any dissent against the upper caste Hindus. Lakha told him:

No, no, my son, no,...we can’t do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient against all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us. Some of them are kind. (Anand, 1981, p. 90)

Lakha was also anxious about his son’s anger as he could possibly hit back by abusing the caste Hindus. He believed that the untouchables should not act against the atrocities perpetrated on them by the high caste Hindus. In utter frustration, Bakha shouted:

They would ill treat us, even if we shouted. They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt. That pundit in the temple tried to molest Sohini and then came shouting: ‘Polluted, polluted.’ The woman of the big house in the

silversmith's gully threw the bread at me from the fourth storey. I won't go down to the town again. I have done with this job. (Anand, 1981, p. 89)

To pacify Bakha's anguished heart, Lakha referred to a nasty incident that happened to him when Bakha was a little child. His son was ill with fever and he wanted medicine for his son. When he went to meet Hakim Bhagawan Das for the medicine for his son, he was not allowed to enter into his chamber because he was an untouchable. He requested everybody to inform the Hakim to come to see the well being of his son but nobody showed any interest in him. Later, to save Bakha's life he forcefully entered into the Hakim's chamber for which the Hakim chastised him severely. Lakha told his son that the Hakim behaved very rudely with him. But the same Hakim visited his house later and saved his son's life. Therefore, he told his son: "No, no,...they are really kind. We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us" (Anand, 1981, p. 93).

In this way, Bakha was made to realise that caste had been a dominant system in the Indian society which could not be changed. In this regard, the remark of Marlene Fisher is noteworthy:

Bakha actually does very little. He neither leads an insurrection nor runs away nor tries actively to change his circumstances. The actual social and economic conditions of the youth's existence were, after all, facts, and Anand was much too grounded in Indian social reality to ignore or gloss over such facts. (Fisher, 1985, p. 27)

After facing many insults from different quarters, Bakha met Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the local Salvation Army whose primary mission was to convert the Indians to

Christianity. He received pity and sympathy from the colonel, but his discontented heart could not get any solace from him. Interestingly, it seemed he could understand the real motif of the colonel, as he said: “The Sahib probably wanted to convert him to his religion. He didn’t want to be converted” (Anand, 1981, p. 143). In fact, he was afraid of the colonel in the later part of their conversation because it seemed to him that the colonel had hidden agenda for talking to him. Again, when the colonel’s wife Mary referred to them as dirty Bhangis and Chamars, at once he realised that their caste was the matter of contention for everyone. Bakha could only show his exasperation through these words: “Everyone thinks us at fault” (Anand, 1981, p. 148). It was really pathetic for Bakha to face humiliation again and again.

Bakha as an untouchable became very conscious of his lowest position in the society. In Golbagh, when Mahatma Gandhi was delivering his lecture, Bakha was captivated by the support of India’s most influential national leader to the cause of removing the scar of untouchability from society. At the same time, he also realised that in spite of having sympathy for them, Mahatma also blamed them through his last words:

They should now cease to accept leavings from the plates of high-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 have asked them to do, they will secure their emancipation. (Anand, 1981, p. 165)

Bakha’s final impression of Gandhi was like this: “To be sure, he is a good man” (Anand, 1981, p.167). Mahatma was the first person who supported the untouchables with an open heart. Through out the day, Bakha was subjected to various exploitations

which led to his sheer hopelessness. The smouldering discontent of Bakha was somewhat pacified by Mahatma's call for a casteless society.

After soothed by the talks of Gandhi, Bakha met the poet Iqbal Nath Sarashar and the Barrister-at-Law R.N. Bashir. They were debating over Mahatma's speech at Golbagh. Bashir was critical of Gandhi's ideology while the poet was supporting him. According to Bakha, poet Iqbal was very much clear about the menace of social evils like untouchability. The poet opined that the caste had been a kind of luxury for the intellectuals at the cost of the happiness and well being of the untouchables. To live a democratic life one must dispense with the mechanical formulas and stereotyped forms of the society. With his practical outlook, the poet was able to offer a realistic solution to the problem of untouchability:

We must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone. The Mahatma didn't say so, but the legal and social basis of caste having been broken down by the British-Indian penal code, which recognises the rights of every man before court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle it- the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (Anand, 1981, p. 173)

Bakha was thrilled at the hope of getting liberation from the curse of untouchability with the use of flush in the latrines. There were questions in his mind about such a machine which could bring respectability to the lives of the untouchables. He decided to tell his father about Gandhi's support to the untouchables. He also wanted to give the information of new hope coming in the form of machine to his father on his reaching home. In this regard, Asnani (1985) commented: "Anand has offered neither solutions nor his preferences. He has merely suggested a choice of possibilities" (p.14).

In this way, Bakha- the untouchable had to face many humiliations because of his birth in a particular caste. The sufferings of Bakha and his entire family at the hands of upper caste Hindus was shocking and inhuman. Humiliations and subjugations confronted by them were not particular to them; such treatments were meted out to all the untouchables. The members of upper caste Hindus were relentless in depriving the untouchables their rights of dignified living. Bakha was full of resentment and discontent representing the indignation and annoyance of the large section of untouchables. It is observed that on the basis of the purity and pollution principle, Bakha and his fellow beings were tormented and exploited without any inhibition. The terrible condition in which untouchables were forced to live can only be understood when we would go through the pages of the novel *U*.

In the ancient times, the rules of purity and pollution might have been just and necessary for the smooth conduct of the society, but when we look at the practical application of these rules in the contemporary Indian society, we will be able to realise the horror of it as these rules are applied on our fellow human beings. As a creative writer, Anand's portrayal of the lives of the untouchables definitely touches the inner

chords of every sensible man and woman of the society. In this regard, it is pertinent to quote Ketaki Goswami:

Anand's humanistic zeal is expressed through a host of negative pictures of the society. Excepting the Gandhi and, to some extent, the padre episodes, all others are bleak pictures of a tabooed society. Mental dirt and material/physical dirt coexist side by side in the world Bakha inhabits. (Goswami, 2009, p. 36)

In *U*, Bakha becomes a glaring example of the suffering youth of the untouchable community. The hopes and dreams of Bakha were same with every other youth of his time. His discontents were at work to expose the menace of untouchability in the pre-Independent Indian society. Bakha's discontent against the obsessively guarded ritualised rules of caste hierarchy was justified because it approved of the sufferings of the untouchables leading to their dehumanisation. Thus, Anand's first novel *U* became a living testament of the pain, misery and distress of the untouchables of India. The novel most faithfully represented the realities of the hardships confronted by the untouchables in their day to day life through the character of Bakha. Iyengar makes a pertinent remark about the enduring interest and perennial value of this book:

Untouchable strikes us as the picture of a place, of a society, and of certain persons not easily to be forgotten: a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy. (Iyengar, 2001, p. 339)

In fact, this particular orthodoxy which Iyengar refers to is horrifying. Bakha and his fellow untouchables were submerged in the rigours of caste system. It was indeed difficult for the untouchables to give vent to their pent up feelings and discontents.

However, it was Bakha who at least tried to express his exasperation through his monologues which sometimes seemed to be like expression of self-pity.

It can be stated that in *U*, all the untouchables accepted their position in the society. Lakha, Rakha, Sohini and other untouchables readily accepted that they were untouchables and therefore they should maintain detachment from the high caste Hindus. They never tried to question the orthodox rituals of the Hindu society. It was only Bakha who always overlooked the customs of the Hindu society which debarred the untouchables from coming into contact with the high caste Hindus. But such an attitude on his part could never be regarded as a rebellion against the social norms of the society. It is true, whenever he faced an adverse reaction from any member of the high caste Hindu society he was angry and inwardly showed his discontent. But he never tried to expand the periphery of his discontent. In fact, he was a lonely figure amongst the untouchables who used to look deep into the norms of orthodox Hindu society and found them inhuman and prejudicial. He never liked his vocation of cleaning the latrines and he expressed it candidly whenever he got chance. That is why, he was elated when the poet Sarashar talked about the flush system to remove all the Harijans from the task of cleaning the latrines. Bakha thought they would be able save themselves from the stigma of untouchability when the flush system would be introduced to the latrines. So, it is clear that Bakha is not a rebel against the social system but a conscious untouchable who could dare to think of discontent against the severe rules of caste system and its results. He could have fought against the caste system had he been an educated young man with the knowledge of the way of the world. Whenever he faced humiliating situation, he asked himself many questions which remained unanswered. He was not having any let out from the web of the caste

system which entwined him and his fellow untouchables in a python grip. At the altar of the caste system, Bakha was a sacrificial lamb. R.S. Singh remarked in this regard: “Between the struggle of the individual and society Bakha is always defeated...Anand’s feeling that individual protest would not change the social order gets recorded in Bakha’s passive acceptance of his destiny” (Singh, n.d., p. 42).

Summing up:

Thus, from the discussion done above, it has been observed that the untouchables were always segregated from the mainstream life of the society. They were secluded as their touch and contact could contaminate and pollute the life of the upper caste Hindus. They could not even draw water from any natural water bodies and public wells. It is not surprising that no untouchable could dare to challenge this social norm. Instead the untouchables did their best to satisfy the upper caste Hindus by showing their servile humility in accepting these rules. It is also observed in the course of the study that Anand portrayed the character of Bakha, keeping in mind the actual social ambience of the society of his time. The rigidity and strictness of the caste system was such that the outcastes and lower castes had to face discrimination in every step of their life. It was as if they were not human beings but beasts of burdens.

The majority of them believed that even if some day they would vanish from the earth, there would not be any harm to the human race. For thousands of years, they had been subjected to discrimination on the basis of caste, the result of which is very severe because whatever is portrayed in *U* may be fictional but the suffering of the untouchable in the caste ridden Indian society is very much real. They had been deprived of all the amenities of civilised life. The untouchables were given secluded

place away from the high caste people to live in. They were not allowed to draw water from the public well and also needed to shout out loud about their approach on the road. They were not permitted to worship in the religious place where clean and noble jatis used to go etc. These are instances of a few injustices done to them which got revealingly expressed in *U*. Though there was no frequent dissatisfaction amongst the untouchables, occasionally they showed their discontent when situation demanded. Apart from Bakha, his father Lakha also once violated the norms of the caste system when he entered into the Hakim's chamber to get medicine for dying Bakha. There is no denying that the untouchables are obsequious to the demands of the society regarding caste, but at the same time, it is also true that only in extreme conditions they expressed their anguish and discontent.

Bakha and his father showed their discontent when they were pushed to the wall. In normal condition they very much acquiesced to the demands of the society. They never questioned the demands of the upper caste Hindu people. In fact, they could not think of bringing about a revolution against the harsh treatment meted out to them in the cruellest manner. They were illiterate and therefore unable to find out the manner of raising their voices against exploitation and injustice. Even when his sister was molested by the priest, Bakha could not rise to the occasion because he was conditioned to accept the atrocities of the caste ridden Hindu society. Opposition and rejection of the system never entered into his mind. Whatever he expressed against the caste system was only preliminary to the rejection of the system. But his feelings never got the opportunity of a proper organisation which was very necessary for revolt. The germ of rejection was there in his mind which might one day get a considerable proportion to be

termed as a complete rejection of the caste system. In fact, Bakha's spirit of rebellion was in a nascent stage, it needed time for growing into a full-fledged rebellion.

While concluding, it is pertinent to quote Anand regarding his views on Bakha:

In *Untouchable* I meant to recreate the lives of the millions of untouchables through one single person, in only one incident, the slap on the face of the hero. Now, the slap on the face evoked all the human relations. Or many human relations, of the sixty-five millions of people whom the hero represents, against the millions of caste Hindus. The essence of the situation of Bakha lies in this insult, as in Dostoevsky's *Insulted and Injured*, as in Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad*. Hadji Murad is a rebel chief, a conscious rebel, who is aware of what he is doing. But, Bakha is an incoherent mass of flesh, just dimly aware of the potential of human dignity. And, therefore, the expression of that delicate feeling of poetry of the imagination, of this so called unimaginative person is revealed, or suggested, in so far as he is aware of his own potential for loving and not being loved. (Rajan, 1986, p. 103)

Although the novel *U* failed to get an adequate readership which was mostly motivated by politics, his international audience did react favourably to the book. Hailing the novel as a minor classic, T. D. Brunton (1968) considered this novel as the testimony to Anand's already preached goal of learning about the self as human being as well as about the value of Indian social life. As already mentioned, E. M. Forster, whom Anand regarded as his most revered teacher, also stated that,

“*Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have

created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity” (Anand, 1981, p. vi).

Mulk Raj Anand’s literary forte lies in the fact that he succeeds in making Bakha stoical but with a smile to laugh at the so called Hindu society. Bakha felt “vaguely ashamed and self conscious at being seen buying sweets” (Anand, 1981, p.51) because his consciousness was shackled by the guilt of working in the polluted occupational environment.

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