

A Study of Miseries Felt by Dalits in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel Untouchable

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Abstract

A struggle has been an integral part of outcast people for a long period of time. They have to face so many challenges and problems for survival. The situation is not improved much even in independent India of the 21st century. Mulk Raj Anand is the author of social novels who represents vices of society like injustice with downtrodden people, unemployment, poverty, and other issues in general. His novels are the mirror of contemporary India. 'Untouchable' is the finest example of Mulk Raj Anand's all novels in which he displays the critical and painful condition of Dalit people.

The novel deals with issues like prohibition of using facilities like going to temples, using public well, and schools for socially ignored people. The rigid caste system and orthodox division system create an injustice for this community. The situation, in the novel, is pathetic when untouchables use the public roads; they have to clean the road which they have used for walking by binding a broom with their bodies. Bakha, one of the central characters of the novel reveals a true picture of downtrodden people by facing so many humiliations. He is representative of miseries faced by members of the community to which he belongs.

Present paper shows though India is reaching at the height of scientific and technological advancement but Dalits are not given that scope to be an important part of the society. People still hesitate to reside in the area of these people. This community has to build their homes far away from the town or villages.

Paper presents the critical analysis of the major social problems depicted in the novel 'Untouchable' by keeping in mind miseries faced by downtrodden people.

Key Words

Miseries, Dalits, Downtrodden, Injustice, Humiliation.

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Introduction

The word 'Dalit' means oppressed or downtrodden people in the context of economic, political and educational background and further in the Caste - system in the name of religion. Etymologically, the word has its root in Indian context. Dalit or downtrodden movement is century old. The great sage Manu had classified the society in four divisions as per their work ability. One can observe that classification as a responsible discriminatory factor to encourage Dalit movement. Actually, Manu had divided people in four categories to bring out their efficiency in a systematic way but his concept was totally misinterpreted. It was upper class 'Brahmins' duty to educate and to liberate the people but instead of that they started exploiting 'Shudras', the name given to one of the four divisions whose duty was to clean the society. Gradually, this part became alien and they were placed at the end of any human residency.

Dalit (Oppressed) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In the 20th century, the term "Dalit literature" came into use in 1958, when the first conference of *Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha* (Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society) was held at Mumbai, a movement driven by thinkers like Jyotiba Phule and Bhimrao Ambedkar. The Primary motive of Dalit literature is to depict miseries felt by Downtroddens and their struggle for liberation from casteist tradition. History bears witness that it was Dr. B.R.Ambedkar who is still considered as inspirational source in directing socially and economically oppressed class. Baburao Bagul (1930–2008) was a pioneer of Dalit writings in Marathi. His first collection of stories, *Jevha Mi Jat Chorali* (When I had Concealed My Caste), published in 1963, created a stir in Marathi literature with its passionate depiction of a crude society and thus brought in new momentum to Dalit literature in Marathi; today it is seen by many critics as the epic of the Downtroddens, and was later made into a film by actor-director Vinay Apte. Gradually with other writers like, Namdeo Dhasal (who founded Dalit Panther), these Dalit writings paved way from strengthening of Dalit politics.

Mulk Raj Anand: An Overview

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is one of the prominent figures in the history of Indian English literature. He is the representative of the contemporary Indian scenario. He is respected not only in Indian periphery but all over the world. He depicted the poor and ignored people in his novel of then India. He along with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao got the international fame in Indian writing in English. Anand's works include the novels, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Lament on the Death of a Master of Art* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword*

and the Sickle (1942), *The Big Heart* (1945), *Seven Summers* (1951), *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), *The Road* (1961), *Death of a Hero* (1963), and a collection of stories, *The Lost Child and Other Stones* and the Golden Breath (1935) etc. Anand was awarded International peace prize by the world peace council in 1952 and was awarded Padma Bhusan in 1962. He was awarded Sahitya Academy Award in 1972 for his novel *Morning Face*.

In his novels Anand tried to put forward the social evils like poverty, unemployment, suffering of downtrodden people, colonialism through the skillful narration. In *Untouchable* he presented how casteism in India is giving rise to discrimination and social segregation in society.

Miseries Felt by Outcast Downtrodden in Untouchable

Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable* portrayed a condition of outcast people. The untouchables lived in kutcha mud-walled, single-roomed cottage that is used as kitchen, sleeping room, sitting room, and for placing baskets, brooms etc.. There was no proper system of drainage and there was foul smell everywhere. The untouchables were not only poor, ill-fed, ill-clothed but also sick and diseased. They were also used to be subjected to great hardships by the insensitive caste Hindus. They could not draw water from the village-well. They can't enter into the temple. They had to depend upon upper caste for their daily food. According to custom, if any other untouchable walked through the bazar, he had to cry around 'posh, posh, sweeper coming'. Ever the shadow of an untouchable should not fall on upper caste. The lower castes people have to suffer because they are by birth outcast.

Novel describes the pathetic conditions of the Dalits through the small family of Lakha, the jamadar of the sweepers. In this novel central character Bakha is a universal figure to show the oppression, injustice, humiliation to the whole community of the outcasts in India. Bakha symbolizes the exploitation and oppression which have been the fate of untouchables like him. His anguish and humiliation are not of his alone, but the miseries of whole outcasts. As K.N. Sinha comments:

"...The novel has a tragic beauty of its own. The will to revolt and the sheer impossibility of successful doing so under the circumstances constitute the basic tension in the novel. The hero is simultaneously a rebel and victim. His anguish becomes our sorrow. But Bakha has no tragic status as scapegoat and a victim, tyrannized by a recalcitrant society. He is the lowest of the lowly whose destiny does not suffer any appreciable erosion." (K.N.Sinha, 56)

The novel depicts a day in the life of Bakha, a Sweeper-boy, and brings out the impact on him of the various events which take place, during the whole day Bakha is an eighteen year old son of Jamadar, Lakha who gets a pair of breeches from an English soldier, and tries to be in 'fassun'. But as the day begins, his work of toilet-cleaning begins with his father's cascade of abuses and unconcealed threats are the rituals he had to undergo all the times-

“...Get up, ohe, you Bakhya, ohe son of pig! ...Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten.” (Anand, 7)

At the request of his father Bakha rushes to the town to clean the roads. While walking through the streets of the town, a caste Hindu gets defiled by his touch For it, he is ill-treated in the words –‘swine dog’ , ‘dirty dog’,‘you brute’. Bakha is unable to react and has to listen and bend down his head, mumbling something. The people gather around the scene and abuse Bakha. He pleads but no one feels pity for him.The defiled man gives a slap on Bakha's face and leaves the place. We sympathize with Bakha when the man says-“This dirty dog bumped right into me”. At that time Muslim tonga-wallah comes to his rescue. Bakha realizes that he has to suffer due to his low cast he wants to rebel he reaches to the temple to announce his arrival aloud. While roaming outside the temple he curiously looks into the temple. A Brahmin sees Bakha on the steps and shouts at him for polluting the temple.

Through the character of Sohini, Bakha's sister, Anand tried to show the picture of Indian sweeper caste people especially the lower caste females. Sohini has to go to village-well to fetch water and wait for water for hours because she is from downtrodden class.; Kalinath, the village priest of the temple out of the special favour draws water to fill Sohini pail, and feels attracted to her beautiful body, and driving away the others suggests her to go to his house later in the day to clean the courtyard. When she goes to his house, he makes improper suggestions to her, and she starts screaming, he shouts 'polluted, polluted', and a crowd of people gather. Sohini tries to tell the truth but no one was ready to believe her. It is the real picture of the outcaste women. It is highly ironical that the shadow of outcast pollutes uppercut but they are not polluted when they try to molest outcast women. Bakha reaches there and finds Sohini standing with her face-downward, attacked by upper caste who sided with Kalinath. Bakha, understands the whole situation, He becomes angry at this moment he feels like a tiger at bay. Saros Cowsjee in her book *So Many Freedoms* rightly says,

“But he is a tiger in a cage, securely imprisoned by the conventions his Superiors have built up to protect themselves against the fury of those whom they exploit.” (Saros Cowasjee, 52)

Bakha remembers the thousands-year old slavery, and controls himself. In this way the voice for justice gets suppressed.

Bakha goes to collect food from door to door . There also he meets with insult he starts shouting for food but nobody responds. Tired of the hectic schedule he sleeps on the wooden platform in front of a upper caste Hindu's house. A high caste woman comes out of the house on the call of a Sadhu, She shouts at Bakha for polluting her house. She asks him to clean the drain to get a piece of bread . It shows that uppercast people were giving priority to Sadhu's even though they were not of any use which means that they were totally dependent upon alms and on the contrary even after cleaning their dirt downtroddens were struggling for a piece of bread. When he returns home, with disappointment he tells his father, “They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt” (Anand, 70)

The society is not at all considerate to him even if he offers a helping hand to it. On one occasion, Bakha was playing hockey with his playmates, the son of a high caste Hindu is injured in the quarrel that takes place after the match. Bakha carries the child in his arms, but the child's mother, instead of thanking Bakha rebukes and abuses him for having polluted her child:

“Oh ! you eater of your masters what have you done? Give me my child. You have defiled the house, besides wounding my son”
(Anand, 106)

Highly disappointed Bakha thinks about the miseries that he has faced whole day. Colonel Huttchinson Christian missionary came into contact and offered him to accept Christianity to get rid from castism. This offer fascinates him but his hope getting liberated from castism shatters as he heard Colonel Hutchinson wife's bitter words and he runs away. At last he reaches to Golbagh to listen Gandhiji's speech. With the sight of Gandhi he forgets all the miseries of the whole day. Gandhi in his long speech expresses his wish to be reborn as an untouchable. He calls them 'Harijan' and the cleaners of Hindu religion. Bhaka also comes to know that the only solution to eradicate untouchability is the use of the machine or the flush system. He feels that there is a little hope that downtrodden will get liberty one day.

One more tragedy for Bakha is that he is not welcomed by uppercast Hindus properly. It is an ironical situation that Bakha gets a warm support and sympathy from non-Hindu castes. So the question of recognition is raised by the author in the novel. They cannot expect any kind of reward or appreciation from the society. Novelist criticizes the orthodox religion system.

Conclusion

To conclude, Mulk Raj Anand tried to bring out the miseries of downtrodden people in pre-independent India in *Untouchable*. His novels make feel the readers to experience how pathetic life of outcast people was at that time. It is his effort to make aware of such social vices. With such radical works and movements, we are observing the result in the condition of this class. Downtrodden started developing their social, educational and economic status. They are given extra provisions in major sphere of life by the constitution of India and other revolutionary organizations to recover from injustice. They succeed in their life with such advantages. Of course, the situation is not as bad as it was earlier. The picture of present India is different than the time of colonialism in India. People like Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar brought the true images of such class. They are treated as human beings now. One can also see their participations at various social affairs. These are the fruits that had been planted by some sages and drastic minds. The novel *Untouchable* is an effort to pay attention to the suffering of outcast people. India saw a drastic change in this matter. But still at some extent, the psychology of so called upper class is not changed. There is a hope that downtrodden people will also enjoy their life as 'Others' live.

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WORLD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR THE YEAR 2013

(Update April 2013)

Sr. No.	Country	GDP, Constant Price (% Change)	Total Investment (% of GDP)	Gross National Savings (% of GDP)	Inflation, Average Consumer Prices (% Change)
1	Afghanistan	3.10	25.95	27.57	6.11
2	Albania	1.80	22.86	13.42	2.17
3	Algeria	3.33	41.60	47.68	5.00
4	Angola	6.18	15.96	19.41	9.40
5	Antigua and Barbuda	1.65	30.07	16.94	2.98
6	Argentina	2.77	23.42	21.56	9.84
7	Armenia	4.30	30.31	20.66	4.20
8	Australia	2.96	29.24	23.73	2.46
9	Austria	0.77	22.90	25.12	2.20
10	Azerbaijan	4.14	24.27	34.86	3.37
11	The Bahamas	2.70	33.69	19.96	2.00
12	Bahrain	4.15	25.61	39.23	2.55
13	Bangladesh	6.01	26.90	30.19	6.54
14	Barbados	0.50	18.43	12.35	4.89
15	Belarus	2.11	44.94	39.72	20.50
16	Belgium	0.16	21.68	21.55	1.73
17	Belize	2.50	19.50	16.35	1.31
18	Benin	4.14	19.16	11.64	3.47
19	Bhutan	6.31	47.69	29.64	10.21
20	Bolivia	4.80	19.91	28.19	4.63
21	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.50	16.08	7.33	1.80
22	Botswana	4.14	26.77	30.71	7.23
23	Brazil	3.02	18.52	16.15	6.13
24	Brunei Darussalam	1.19	18.06		1.50
25	Bulgaria	1.20	24.36	22.47	2.05
26	Burkina Faso	7.03	17.77	14.03	2.00
27	Burundi	4.47	20.00	3.72	9.02
28	Cambodia	6.68	23.50	13.62	3.07
29	Cameroon	5.40	19.74	16.26	3.00
30	Canada	1.46	24.33	20.81	1.49
31	Cape Verde	4.11	35.18	21.95	3.96
32	Central African Republic	4.33	15.75	10.36	1.97
33	Chad	8.07	33.68	29.46	1.52
34	Chile	4.94	25.11	21.07	2.14
35	China	8.04	47.05	49.70	3.01
36	Colombia	4.09	23.23	19.81	2.22
37	Comoros	3.55	19.29	12.62	4.29
38	Democratic Republic of the Congo	8.30	28.98	16.99	6.83
39	Republic of Congo	6.38	29.49	32.29	4.54
40	Costa Rica	4.20	20.69	15.15	4.67
41	Côte d'Ivoire	7.97	17.50	14.76	3.10
42	Croatia	-0.20	20.43	20.48	3.16
43	Czech Republic	0.30	23.92	21.84	2.25
44	Denmark	0.84	17.68	22.37	2.00
45	Djibouti	4.96	26.88	15.92	2.50
46	Dominica	1.25	15.30	1.52	2.30

Sr. No.	Country	GDP, Constant Price (% Change)	Total Investment (% of GDP)	Gross National Savings (% of GDP)	Inflation, Average Consumer Prices (% Change)
47	Dominican Republic	2.23	15.33	10.77	4.45
48	Ecuador	4.45	28.71	27.37	4.66
49	Egypt	2.01	15.53	13.46	8.24
50	El Salvador	1.60	14.56	9.67	1.90
51	Equatorial Guinea	-2.05	46.77	35.53	5.00
52	Eritrea	3.36	8.72	10.78	12.26
53	Estonia	2.99	27.52	27.56	3.20
54	Ethiopia	6.50	31.75	23.21	8.28
55	Fiji	2.22	16.72		3.02
56	Finland	0.51	19.24	17.54	2.90
57	France	-0.07	19.22	17.92	1.57
58	Gabon	6.08	31.45	41.97	3.00
59	The Gambia	8.90	19.28	3.60	5.45
60	Georgia	5.98	26.59	16.63	0.96
61	Germany	0.61	17.37	23.46	1.61
62	Ghana	6.89	21.01	9.44	8.45
63	Greece	-4.21	13.20	12.91	-0.80
64	Grenada	0.50	20.09	-3.29	2.60
65	Guatemala	3.30	14.60	10.91	4.30
66	Guinea	4.51	28.71	3.55	11.23
67	Guinea-Bissau	4.20	4.46	-1.21	3.00
68	Guyana	5.51	25.40	11.25	5.59
69	Haiti	6.50	29.50	23.89	6.75
70	Honduras	3.30	25.83	14.60	5.70
71	Hong Kong SAR	2.96	26.07	27.33	3.50
72	Hungary	-0.01	18.04	20.18	3.20
73	Iceland	1.89	14.87	12.10	4.65
74	India	5.68	35.15	30.20	10.82
75	Indonesia	6.30	35.57	32.29	5.57
76	Islamic Republic of Iran	-1.25	33.91	37.55	27.20
77	Iraq	9.04		23.50	4.30
78	Ireland	1.07	9.76	13.16	1.32
79	Israel	3.56	18.39	20.07	1.64
80	Italy	-1.47	17.57	17.89	1.99
81	Jamaica	0.55	26.08	15.93	8.49
82	Japan	1.58	21.20	22.44	0.06
83	Jordan	3.25	27.31	17.28	5.89
84	Kazakhstan	5.50	22.75	26.78	7.22
85	Kenya	5.85	20.89	13.50	5.17
86	Kiribati	2.50			2.50
87	Korea	2.85	27.35	30.10	2.36
88	Kosovo	2.94			2.36
89	Kuwait	1.06	18.42	59.24	3.33
90	Kyrgyz Republic	7.37	25.84	18.23	8.61
91	Lao P.D.R.	8.03			7.32
92	Latvia	4.16	26.94	25.11	1.80
93	Lebanon	2.00	24.02	7.94	6.66

Sr. No.	Country	GDP, Constant Price (% Change)	Total Investment (% of GDP)	Gross National Savings (% of GDP)	Inflation, Average Consumer Prices (% Change)
94	Lesotho	3.55	38.60	28.07	4.90
95	Liberia	7.47			6.37
96	Libya	20.19	20.74	46.54	2.00
97	Lithuania	3.05	18.02	16.71	2.13
98	Luxembourg	0.05	20.61	27.25	1.93
99	FYR Macedonia	2.02		24.03	2.50
100	Madagascar	2.62	24.48	19.28	7.00
101	Malawi	5.48	21.46	19.81	20.20
102	Malaysia	5.10	26.40	32.36	2.20
103	Maldives	3.76	17.49	-8.11	5.82
104	Mali	4.82	19.53	12.67	2.92
105	Malta	1.31	12.66	13.16	2.37
106	Marshall Islands	2.29			3.87
107	Mauritania	5.91	42.14	21.61	4.67
108	Mauritius	3.72	25.07	15.26	5.66
109	Mexico	3.39	24.40	23.29	3.69
110	Micronesia	0.76			4.18
111	Moldova	4.00	23.37	13.41	4.64
112	Mongolia	14.04	51.07	28.93	11.14
113	Montenegro	1.23	21.07	0.53	2.71
114	Morocco	4.52	36.45	29.46	2.47
115	Mozambique	8.40	38.03	12.64	5.44
116	Myanmar	6.47	17.11	12.89	6.50
117	Namibia	4.15	21.12	17.45	5.95
118	Nepal	3.01	32.67	32.54	9.62
119	Netherlands	-0.53	16.39	25.06	2.82
120	New Zealand	2.74	20.13	14.30	1.39
121	Nicaragua	4.00	25.68	11.98	7.02
122	Niger	6.17	37.70	18.76	1.73
123	Nigeria	7.16	23.65	29.15	10.67
124	Norway	2.46	25.90	37.64	1.50
125	Oman	4.16	31.85	41.74	3.33
126	Pakistan	3.51	12.95	12.25	8.16
127	Panama	8.98	27.96	19.06	5.20
128	Papua New Guinea	4.43	20.57	9.82	7.94
129	Paraguay	11.00	14.16	11.72	3.55
130	Peru	6.28	26.54	23.07	2.07
131	Philippines	6.02	20.10	22.53	3.06
132	Poland	1.31	21.25	17.66	1.85
133	Portugal	-2.32	14.49	14.64	0.70
134	Qatar	5.20	27.02	56.29	3.02
135	Romania	1.60	27.49	23.76	4.62
136	Russia	3.37	26.24	28.79	6.86
137	Rwanda	7.60	23.81	13.63	4.94
138	Samoa	0.87			2.00
139	San Marino	-3.52	19.21		1.63
140	São Tomé and Príncipe	4.50	48.64	23.95	9.26

Sr. No.	Country	GDP, Constant Price (% Change)	Total Investment (% of GDP)	Gross National Savings (% of GDP)	Inflation, Average Consumer Prices (% Change)
141	Saudi Arabia	4.39	29.00	48.20	3.74
142	Senegal	4.02	30.85	22.39	1.52
143	Serbia	2.00	19.67	10.97	9.57
144	Seychelles	3.22	34.68	16.56	4.64
145	Sierra Leone	17.14	15.31	5.61	8.67
146	Singapore	2.01	27.69	44.56	4.01
147	Slovak Republic	1.39	21.19	23.35	1.90
148	Slovenia	-2.00	16.66	19.31	1.76
149	Solomon Islands	4.05	23.33	12.75	5.44
150	South Africa	2.84	19.76	13.38	5.77
151	South Sudan	32.06	7.53	7.73	15.53
152	Spain	-1.56	18.11	19.21	1.94
153	Sri Lanka	6.25	31.87	26.62	7.89
154	St. Kitts and Nevis	1.92	48.00	32.06	2.97
155	St. Lucia	1.10	32.71	14.51	4.78
156	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	1.03	27.63	0.84	1.74
157	Sudan	1.16	16.83	9.96	28.44
158	Suriname	4.46			4.83
159	Swaziland	-0.01	10.44	9.21	8.13
160	Sweden	1.01	18.82	24.85	0.30
161	Switzerland	1.28	21.38		-0.20
162	Taiwan Province of China	2.96	19.73	30.08	2.00
163	Tajikistan	7.00	16.85	14.62	7.72
164	Tanzania	6.98	39.10	24.29	9.00
165	Thailand	5.88	29.86	30.87	3.00
166	Timor-Leste	10.00			8.00
167	Togo	5.13	20.24	13.31	4.22
168	Tonga	1.48	29.79		5.28
169	Trinidad and Tobago	2.05	13.91	24.67	5.59
170	Tunisia	4.00	25.42	18.09	6.00
171	Turkey	3.43	20.96	14.16	6.64
172	Turkmenistan	7.71			5.64
173	Tuvalu	1.28			2.66
174	Uganda	4.84	21.12	8.26	5.47
175	Ukraine		16.77	8.86	0.48
176	United Arab Emirates	3.14	23.16	31.52	1.59
177	United Kingdom	0.69	15.12	10.75	2.65
178	United States	1.85	16.76	13.84	1.83
179	Uruguay	3.80	20.74	17.88	7.32
180	Uzbekistan	7.00	30.80	34.29	10.94
181	Vanuatu	4.27			1.69
182	Venezuela	0.07	25.90	32.09	27.34
183	Vietnam	5.24	22.78	30.72	8.80
184	Yemen	4.39	10.34	6.03	7.50
185	Zambia	7.83	28.22	25.91	6.53
186	Zimbabwe	4.96	27.31	4.36	4.45

Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2013.

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