



Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: An untouchable voyage from mimicry to ambivalence

Imran Khan

Lecturer, Central Women's University, 6, Hatkhola Road, Tikatuli, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract

E. M. Forster wrote in the 'Preface' of this novel, '*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. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position.' (P. vii). Written with regards to British India, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* presents one single day in Bakha's life, a sweeper kid whose fundamental duty is to clean latrines. The general population like him was thought to be an untouchable that implies coming to direct contact with them is like sin and contamination. On the off chance that anyone contacted or got contacted with them, the contacted one needed to (incredibly, high ranks are constantly 'contacted' rather than 'contacting' whoever is responsible for the physical contact) refine himself by washing from head to toe. Individuals like Bakha were thought to be filthy as they used to clean the 'gentlemen's dirt' (79). Thus, an untouchable's duty was to declare his appearance like 'Posh, keep away, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!' (42). The novel shows different social embarrassments he experiences each day and how he is reliant on the benevolence and extra nourishment of others. In fact, even he isn't permitted to visit gods in temples as only the high caste individuals can go there. Being disregarded and mortified for a long time, he weakly dreams of getting to be as shrewd as the British tommies. Normally mimicry is viewed as a shortcoming and obliviousness of the colonized individuals as they are viewed as uninformed of their own way of life and dialect and way of life. Indeed, we will discover obliviousness here as well when Mahatma Gandhi touches base as a character toward the climax of the novel. However, obliviousness likewise has measurements. This paper means to investigate the social state of that time of British Raj. At the same time, the paper attempts to discover answers to some important inquiries. For example, is the standing framework still comparatively substantial? Do individuals still maintain a strategic distance from the dash of the sweepers? The facts demonstrate that individuals do not abhor them much these days. At that point, is the novel invalid today? We frequently go or brush through bunches of individuals on street; do we think who a sweeper is? May be not. However, the reason may lie in the last part of the novel where a scholarly recommends bringing in such innovation that will diminish the sweepers from the weight of the noble men's feces that implies the chests that can flush the dirt with just a single button push. Is that what truly occurred? Is western commode then the fundamental saint of reducing position framework? Indeed, even these days we do not mean cleaning latrines and sweeping as same occupation. However, in the event that the circumstance is changed, at that point is the issue fathomed? Not in the slightest degree. Rather, there is a journey from mimicry to ambivalence. The second inquiry is, is just the West responsible for Eastern mimicry, or the East additionally has made a positive circumstance that clearly incites the mimicry? The third inquiry is, does the religion established in Indian subcontinent bolster standing framework? Above all, the motivation behind this paper is to demonstrate how the Indian culture has ventured out from mimicry to ambivalence.

Keywords: 'Preface', *Untouchable*, mimicry

1. Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand wanted to show us an India which is progressing gradually after independence but still is colonized. The western 'white' influence is somehow dehumanizing. According to Primal Paul, Anand desires to 'create in [his] readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evils, to stir the springs of tenderness in them, and to activate them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable or a just social order may come into being' (*The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand: A Thematic Study*. 12). We see mimicry at the specific start of the novel where Anand is portraying a tad about Bakha's past life when he had been functioning as a sweeper in the British Tommies' military enclosure where he 'had been gotten by the excitement of the 'white man's life' (p. 2). Benita Parry says in "Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism", 'There is of course abundant evidence of

native disaffection and dissent under colonial rule, of contestation and struggle against diverse forms of institutional and ideological domination.' (85)

We are given one of Bakha's buddies, Chota, who 'oiled his hair profusely, and parted it like the Englishmen on one side, wore a pair of shorts at hockey and smoked cigarettes like them (p. 2). Anand clears up, Bakha was a child of modern India. The clear-cut styles of European dress had impressed his naïve mind' (p. 2). Again Bakha can be found looking with inciting at a shop where the formal attire and diverse things of the English Tommies were indicated accessible to be acquired like 'the scarlet and khaki uniforms discarded or pawned by the Tommies, pith solar topees, peak caps, knives, forks, buttons, old books and other oddments' (p. 3) and considering, 'I will resemble a sahib, and I will walk like them. Similarly as they do, in twos, with Chota as my buddy. Be that as it may, I have no

cash to purchase things' (p. 3). Additionally, we see Ram Charan, another friend of Bakha, scorning Bakha and Chota naming them 'Pilpali sahib' (p. 4) which signifies 'impersonation sahib', that implies he is unquestionably demonstrative of mimicry. He disdains Indian method for bathing as the British Tommies detest it (p. 10). We see him altogether disregarding his father's longing to cognizant him from rest anyway twisting up rapidly aware of the call of a sepoy as a sepoy addresses the sahibs. What's more, along these lines we see him passing one single day of his life where he faces a huge number of segregations defrauding him. He gets down to business one day to play out his obligation as a sweeper when his father is wiped out and the reader observes a progression of pitiable scenes. When he needs to purchase something, he has to put the cash on a particular place a long way from the shop and the retailer tosses the item as we toss scraps to a puppy. When he unwittingly brushes past a 'high cast' babu, he faces an inconceivable affront and mortification from where he deals with a close shave. What's more, finally his experience of tuning in to Gandhi gives him a leap forward to inner conflict and he ends up mindful of his own religion and culture in its most genuine shape. We see the repeated use of the words 'gentleman' and 'fashun' which are allegorical mockeries to their mimicry and the British Colonization. People like Bakha do not have any access to school or any other educational institutions as 'schools are meant for the babus, not for the lowly sweepers' (p.30). But paradoxically, the word babu itself is similar to slavery. In this regard Ghulam Murshid said, 'In 1782, the term babu was first used in English to mean something specific. It meant Bengali clerks who knows English.' (p. 94). Mulk Raj Anand gives a short background of the untouchables where he says, 'He came of peasant stock, his ancestors having come down in the social scale by their change of profession. The blood of his peasant ancestors, free to live their own life even though they may have been slaves, raced in him now' (p. 56). In this short but strong description the true identity of this agricultural land is presented. Colonized society made them untouchables. Evidently the position framework is diminished now yet intrinsically the class framework has replaced rank framework. Physical touch isn't hostile now however physical contempt is established into human mind. We do not see the high society individuals embracing the lower ones even today. The tycoons do not consider the rickshaw puller organization as their sibling however we locate an optimistic picture in the text books. So society made this rank framework for offering support to the alleged 'babus' which exploited the once transcendent workers. Even in the temples we see that the untouchables are not allowed to enter. God has also been monopolized by the 'mimic babus'. A solid picture of the spoiled base of the way of life of the colonized can be discovered where Bakha goes to the sanctuary. Bakha sneaked into the sanctuary and saw 'A brass cage of a miniature temple with the beautifully polished image of a snake enclosed in it, lay on a small stone structure which surrounded the giant trunk of the banyan tree' (p. 48) which instigates questions in Bakha's psyche, 'What is that snake image? What does it mean?' (p. 48). What would it be able to mean really? No answer is given by the author yet we can guess. Bakha is viewing the circumstance of the entire nation or if nothing else the entire network of the untouchables initially. Religion, culture and mankind have been contaminated. A sanctuary gathered be

blessed, so is a nation. The banyan tree is the sanctuary of all the storage compartment of which is encompassed by the noxious snake. At the point when a snake is at the foundation of a protecting tree, does anyone set out to go adjacent? Hence individuals like Bakha can't have the gift of the divine beings as the human toxic substance camouflaged as a snake is looping around it. Hence 'The temple seems to advance towards him like a monster, and to envelop him (p. 50).

Along these lines, Bakha turns into his very own hater living spot and admirer of whatever is left of the world and whatever is left of the world means the universe of the British tommies to him. Men become accustomed to a place, get comfortable with it, and afterward come a phase when the interest of the obscure, the outlandish, rules them. It is the drive which attempts to make amicability, disapproving of the commonplace which has become stale and bleak with an excessive amount of utilization. The mind which has once peeped into the wonderland of the new, mulled over different parts of it with yearning and want, is stunned and baffled when living reality pulls in the reins of the wild steed of extravagant. In any case, how lovely men discover it to take a gander at the world with the open, cheerful, amazed eyes of the kid! that is the reason 'he didn't like his home, his street, his town, because he had been to work at the Tommies' barracks, and obtained glimpses of another world, strange and beautiful; he had grown out of his native shoes into the ammunition boots that he had secured as a gift. And with this and other strange and exotic items of dress he had built up a new world, which was commendable, if for nothing else, because it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born. He was a pioneer in his own way, although he had never heard of that world, and was completely unconscious that it could be applied to him' (p. 69). As P.K. Ranjan mentioned in his *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand*, 'Anand's art became a vehicle to advance [the] cause of democratic revolution led by the bourgeoisie. The characteristic elements of this revolution were: (i) its determination to put an end to imperialistic rule, (ii) its opposition to all forms of feudalist exploitation and oppression, especially evil social practices including casteism and untouchability, (iii) its humanistic craving to uplift the condition of the downtrodden, and (iv) its general acceptance of the leadership of the bourgeoisie.' (7)

The pith of Hinduism and the place of standing framework in it have been cleared up through the discourse of Gandhi who shows up in this novel as a real-life character. R. P. Masani states that the supporters of Hinduism trust that 'the four castes [of the caste system] had emerged from four different limbs of the Creator of the Universe, the underlying idea is not one of detachment but of union' (151). In the last part of this novel Bakha abruptly observes a large number of individuals surging towards a common destination and he comes to realize that the considerable Mahatma is going to a specific place to convey a discourse before the mass individuals. Who doesn't know Mahatma? So Bakha likewise surges towards the colossal man to hear him out. He has gained before from optional sources that Gandhi never segregates among individuals and he doesn't have faith in caste system. So Bakha races to consider him to be if Gandhi were a friend in need. Despite the fact that Anand doesn't clarify, yet readers can figure that Bakha isn't searching for an answer as he has officially discovered it.

Resembling British tommies is the main answer for him. He is uninformed of the genuine embodiment of religion and he conceives that Hinduism implies station framework and he is unapproachable and egregious because of his wrongdoings in his past life. At the point when Anand composed this novel, the greater part of the general population used to think the same. In the group Bakha haphazardly listens individuals discussing Mahatma. One babu says, 'India has been the privileged home of the world's eternal religion, that teaches how every man and woman, according to their birth and environment, must practice *swadharma* (sense-control), how through sense control they must evolve their higher nature, and so realize the bliss of divinity, deep-seated in the hearts of all beings. For this bliss all humanity blindly pants, not knowing that neither cigarettes nor cinemas nor sense-enjoyment can lead to the path of *dharmic* discipline, which alone is the highest bliss to be realized.... Gandhi will reveal this path to the modern world; he will teach us the true religion of God-love which is the best *swaraj* (self government)' (p. 129). So here we have the dash of the primary substance of this novel that is the genuine religion of Indian subcontinent which is obscure to individuals like Bakha and purposefully manhandled by individuals like the savants and babus. Position framework has been forced on a gathering of individuals and they have been hegemonized this is Hinduism and station framework is inescapable. Through another exchange of a similar babu, Anand strikes the possibility of progress characterized by the West, '*Bhai ji*, do not you know, that according to Mr. Radha Kumud Mukerji we had canals in ancient India four thousand years before Christ? Who made the Grand Trunk Road? Not the British!' (p. 130). The West dependably asserts itself as the icon and pioneer of human civilization. It has characterized human progress in such a way which will assist it with colonizing and hegemonizing us. As a rule by progress the West shows mechanical headway in which segment the East is lingering behind than the West. However, in this exchange of the babu, it turns out to be certain that even before the entry of the Christ, the East was innovatively further developed than the West and Radha Kumud Mukerji is such an antiquarian who can't be disregarded. At this point when Mahatma says in his discourse, 'I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts leveled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition. Therefore I prayed that, if I should be born again, I should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, but as an outcaste, as an Untouchable.' (p. 138), we can envision how this discourse affected Bakha. This one discourse from The Mahatma is considerably more effect making than a great many hooting of the general population around Bakha. At that point, Mahatma expresses the message that Anand needs the entire India to figure it out, 'They claim to be Hindus. They read the scriptures. If, therefore, the Hindus oppress them, they should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion, but in those who profess it. In order to emancipate themselves, they have to purify themselves. They have to rid themselves of evil habits, like drinking liquor and eating carrion.' (p. 139). R.T. Robertson writes that the caste division, or untouchability, is paradoxical: 'Bakha is both isolated from and bound to his culture; it will not allow him fully to

participate in the society and cannot release him from it because of the essential service he performs for it' (101). The period of life impact the untouchable encounters about existence as the distant needs to hold up under human feces and live close to the lavatories. In addition, he doesn't have ideal to utilize uncontaminated water, consequently, he is without the privilege to end up clean. This leads him to being additionally loathed by society. Incomprehensibly, the general public itself can't spotless itself without the untouchable's administration.

Does caste system still exist? The separation of the untouchables was wiped out by a law in 1950. So why should we analyse this novel now? Paul states in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand: A Thematic Study*, that 'This canker of class system often results in the segregation and subjugation of thousands of people into perpetual misery and eventual extinction. Class has certainly proved more divisive than caste in Indian society because it is able to affect every section of the society at the economic, cultural and political levels' (31). A report from *The Times of India*, dated March 31, 2018 says that a Dalit man named Pradeep Rathod was beaten to death by upper caste people. His crime was, he used to ride a horse. The upper class people think that a Dalit has no right to ride a horse. Again, a short interview distributed in BBC online on 27 June, 2012 says a heart melting story of Dr Vinod Sonkar, a Dalit who, even subsequent to acquiring a Ph.D, can't outnumber his image as an untouchable. Subsequent to drinking some tea at a restaurant, the administrator asked which rank he had a place with. Having realized that he was a Dalit, the chief requesting that he wash his own glass as nobody would contact that. Dr. Vinod Sonkar said to the journalist, 'He didn't want to touch whatever I had touched. I made it impure. I am an untouchable.'

2 Conclusion

Hence, it can be said that the untouchable system is still going on. Law can never abolish a system; it can just impose some dos and donts on people. But people are very much racial in their soul. What the word 'Dalit' indicates is: The people who are dominated because of the so called society-defined caste system. The White Supremacy is another example of this. The Muslims are 'Dalitizing' the Hindus, the Hindus are also doing the same to the Muslims. The white people are undermining the blacks, even killing them. So far as India is concerned (as Anand's focus was his won country), as the caste system is abolished in India by law now, people can't practice it in daylight. But they have preserved it in their mind and show it whenever possible.

References

1. Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2001. Print.
2. Anand. Ed. R.K. Dhawan : 98-104. Print.
3. Khan, Imran. *Untouchable: A journey from mimicry to ambivalence*. The Asian Age. Retrieved from Print, 2016.
4. Masani RP. *The Legacy of India*. Ed. G. T. Garrat. Oxford Print, 1937, 150-151.
5. Murshid, Ghulam. *Hajar Bochorer Bangali Samskriti (One thousand Years of Bengali Culture)*. Dhaka: Abosar, 2012. Print.
6. Parry, Benita. "Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism".

- Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader. Ed. Padmini Mongina. New Delhi: Oxford UP Print, 1997, 84-109.
7. Paul, Premila. *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand : A Thematic Study*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Print., 1983,
 8. Rajan, PK, Mulk Raj Anand. *A Revaluation*. New Delhi: Arnold Associates, 1995. Print.
 9. Robertson RT. *Untouchable as an Archetypal Novel* *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies* 2.1 (Spring), 1977, 5-15. Print.
 10. *India's Dalits still fighting untouchability*. *bbc.com*, 2012.
 11. *Dalit man killed for riding horse in Gujarat*. *timesofindia.indiatimes.com*, 2018. Web.