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## Three Fold Exploitation in the Novel Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand

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### ABSTRACT

The novel Untouchable shows how all three types of exploitation are connected, ensnaring the untouchable in a vicious cycle of destitution, humiliation, and helplessness. M.R. Anand emphasizes how caste-based discrimination exposes people to constant exploitation, unfair humiliation and treatment in a stratified society via moving stories. The concept of perseverance in the face of hardship is central to the story because Anand gives his characters a tangible sense of dignity and sadness. The heroes' tenacity shows how the human spirit can persevere in the face of hardship despite persistent structural injustices. The entrance of Mahatma Gandhi, who represents optimism and promotes the empowerment of the poor, gives Anand's story a transforming quality. The central theme of the book Untouchable is the evil of untouchability which is a biting critique of the Indian caste system. The ongoing humiliation of underprivileged populations is highlighted by the forced cleaning of human waste, verbal abuse, physical separation, and denial of basic human decency, such as touching a temple or getting food.

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### Introduction:

The 18 year old sweeper Bakha is the protagonist of Mulk Raj Anand's (1935) novel Untouchable, which is a biting critique of the Indian caste system. The book shows how the strict caste system systematically dehumanizes the untouchables through economic, social, and sexual exploitation. Bakha, a teenage sweeper, is brutally exploited by highcaste Hindus on a systematic social and economic level in



the (1935) novel, *Untouchable*. The ongoing humiliation of underprivileged populations is highlighted by the forced cleaning of human waste, verbal abuse, physical separation, and denial of basic human decency, such as touching a temple or getting food. The central theme of the book *Untouchable* is the evil of untouchability which is a biting critique of the Indian caste system. The ongoing humiliation of underprivileged populations is highlighted by the forced cleaning of human waste, verbal abuse, physical separation, and denial of basic human decency, such as touching a temple or getting food. It highlights the suffering endured by the untouchables. Even in contemporary Indian society, a certain segment of the population is subjected to injustice, humiliation, and degradation. In order to prevent "polluting" upper castes, the untouchables are compelled to reside on the outskirts of town, are not allowed to use public wells, and are not allowed to enter temples. Bakha is compelled to work as a manual scavenger, cleaning the town's dirty latrines, for which he is abused and paid with meagre, frequently stale food instead of fair wages. Bakha is beaten, mistreated, and charged with "polluting" a man simply by coming into contact with him on the street. A priest molests his sister Sohini and accuses her of defiling him.

Victims like Bakha are forced to live a "marginalized" life where they are viewed as nothing more than "dirt" because of the system. Despite their seeming religiosity, high caste Hindus treat the sweepers with extreme harshness and inhumanity, exposing a profoundly ingrained, discriminating, and hypocritical social structure. With Gandhi's arrival providing a ray of hope for the eradication of such injustices, the story offers a moving critique of these, emphasizing the "naked realities" of social problems and the need for change. The three forms of exploitation in *Untouchable* are classified as sexual, social, and economic. All other kinds of exploitation stem from the social form, which is based on the idea of "pollution by touch."

### **Objectives:**

- To provide a multidimensional approach to end social, religious and economic oppression in pre-independence India.
- To transform moral consciousness of Indian society, promoting equality.
- To promote self respect for the untouchables and eliminate caste based discrimination.

The untouchables are compelled to live apart from the upper caste Hindus in a filthy community on the town's outskirts. They are completely dependent on the mercy of the higher castes for basic needs like water because they are prohibited access to public facilities like wells, schools, and temples. In order to prevent contaminating highcaste Hindus with his touch, Bakha is made to yell warnings of his approach



and is treated worse than a dog. When he is accused of groping a man on the street, the mob in the book takes "sadistic delight" in seeing him suffer insults. The untouchables are forced into jobs that society considers "filthy" and are paid very little for their labour. Every day, Bakha is made to sweep the streets and labour in the latrines. He is compensated for his hard labor with leftover bread (roti), which upper-caste women frequently toss at him instead of cash. They are unable to pursue other, more respectable jobs because of the caste system. The "custodians of religion" sexually harass the most vulnerable, especially women. In the temple grounds, a priest named Pundit Kali Nath tries to abuse Bakha's sister, Sohini. The priest manipulates the situation by yelling that he has been "polluted" by Sohini's touch while she screams to get away. For an unintentional, insignificant physical encounter with an upper-caste man, Bakha is publicly spanked.

The novel *Untouchable* shows how all three types of exploitation are connected, ensnaring the untouchable in a vicious cycle of destitution, humiliation, and helplessness. Anand emphasizes how caste-based discrimination exposes people to constant exploitation, unfair humiliation and treatment in a stratified society via moving stories. The concept of perseverance in the face of hardship is central to the story because Anand gives his characters a tangible sense of dignity and sadness. The heroes' tenacity shows how the human spirit can persevere in the face of hardship despite persistent structural injustices. The entrance of Mahatma Gandhi, who represents optimism and promotes the empowerment of the poor, gives Anand's story a transforming quality.

Anand gently suggests paths for social change and the advancement of underprivileged groups through Gandhi's presence, reflecting themes of equality and social justice that run throughout the book. *Untouchable* is essentially a powerful call to action for a more inclusive and just society as well as a moving critique of longstanding societal injustices. Readers and academics alike are profoundly impacted by Anand's skillful narrative and sympathetic storytelling, which shed light on the persistent hardships and goals of the marginalized. Thus, the exploitation of young adults is the main theme of "Untouchable." Bakha is deprived of his basic right to develop into decent members of society. Bakha's life is destined to be a nightmare from the start, regardless of his desire to rise beyond his wretched life style.

In the Preface of *Untouchable*, E.M. Forster makes this point. Boys from Bakha are required to work for a living and should be old enough to attend school. Although he is aware that he cannot attend school, he nevertheless yearns to do so. This desire is sparked by his admiration for the school-age lads. He would have attended school and studied like other kids if he had had a safe upbringing. Bakha saw the



passionate, excited expression on the child's face. The fear of attending school! It felt so lovely! How lovely that it can read and write!

According to Prof. H.M. Williams, Anand exemplifies the issue of "untouchability," the treatment of the latrine-cleaning class bound to isolation and hardship as handlers of excrement; he identifies this as a societal evil and proposes a solution. Numerous instances in the book expose the harsh and unvarnished facts of civilization. One such instance is when the untouchables suffer abuse, are ravished, and have their morale completely destroyed. The novel's well event beautifully illustrates how the so called high class touchable usurps these unfortunate individuals. Once, Bakha's sister fetches water from the village well. She is not permitted to touch anything in the well because she is untouchable, so she waits to be given some water. In the end, the village priest takes the necessary action and invites her to clean his home. However, he tries to harass her as she goes home because he doesn't see anyone. In the turbulent waves, the priest attempts to fish. The cruller believes that the priest falsely accuses the innocent girl of defiling his religion when a crowd gathers. "They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt," he says as he frantically returns home and informs his father Lakha about the pandit's remark and Sohini's abuse. From a humanitarian standpoint, we have to admit that might is correct in this situation. We can tell from the outset of the book that Bakha and his sister were fighting for their financial identity and social life because the untouchables are weak and lack justice. The caste system is the source of economic exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, as Bakha, the main character, is compelled to perform humiliating, unpaid, or inadequately compensated sanitation labour. Bakha's livelihood is limited by social hierarchy and a lack of economic mobility, and he endures institutional oppression, economic marginalization, and humiliation as a sweeper. Bakha's economic prospects are limited to this one, hated job of cleaning latrines, which is considered "untouchable" by higher castes. The lower caste group is totally dependent on the upper caste residents; they frequently rely on the generosity of those who mistreat them and receive little food or salaries. Bakha and his family frequently had to clean human excrement with their bare hands while working in dangerous situations without tools, underscoring the harsh, dangerous, and unpaid nature of their labor. The book demonstrates how social prejudice, or casteism, is utilized to uphold economic inequality, guaranteeing that the untouchables continue to be socially excluded, economically helpless, and imprisoned in poverty. Bakha's life depends on adhering to the rigid societal norms, and Anand depicts this economic exploitation as a means of upholding the power relations. The overall analysis of his 1935 fictional work "*Untouchable*," which depicts the hopeless lives of common people, is set in the so-called upper caste Hindu colony outside of an unnamed town during British control in India. The novel's subject matter is based on the lives of the outcasts—the



most marginalized, hated, and mistreated segment of Indian society. The protagonist Bakha, who is eighteen years old, is a symbol of all the oppressed people in India's pre-independence society. He appears to be a proud, robust, and physically fit member of the Indian society of the time, and he thinks he is the best young man among his fellow misfits.

Despite his duty to continue sweeping the roads and cleaning the restroom, he frequently faces humiliation and dishonor during the working day, which casts a shadow on his remaining time. The sociopolitical, economic, and cultural issues of the downtrodden and suppressed people who have never been represented in literature before are revealed by the author. Through the character of Bakha, he depicts the depressing circumstances of the untouchables, their unavoidable suffering, and their bodily and mental agonies with almost the exacting precision of a historical raconteur. The pitiful situation of untouchables, who endure unavoidable social humiliations because of their low birth, is realistically documented and transcribed. Anand's characters are impoverished from birth. The protagonists' depressing circumstances and state of hopelessness force them to face the truth of romantic illusions of human existence. Under the long-standing colonial yoke of despair and debauchery, which resulted from the exploitation of colonial rulers and Indian elites that consistently rob people of their labour dignity and human values, they manage their own food. When his sister Sohini goes to the well to get water for her brother Bakha, she encounters humiliation in the community and the assault of the upper class. She is aware of her brother's fatigue and thirst. She waits for a long time to get a chance of collecting water as untouchables don't have their well. Anand marks:

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever 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. They had no well of their own because it cost a lot of money to dig a well in such a hilly town as Bulandshahar. Perforce they had to collect at the foot of the caste Hindu's well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers (p. 26).

A caste Hindu is defiled by his touch while strolling through the town's streets. He tries to apologize by combining his hands in humility, but he is rendered deaf and dumb. People congregate around the scene and mistreat Bakha. He begs, but nobody is sympathetic to him. After slapping Bakha across the face, the soiled man walks away. Bakha learns that he is an untouchable for the first time in his life. Feeling arrogant, he dashes to the temple courtyard and makes a loud announcement of his arrival. He wanders outside the temple and peers inquisitively.



When a Brahmin spots Bakha on the steps, he yells at him for contaminating the temple. As he descends the stairs, he discovers his sister Sohini standing in the courtyard, terrified and unable to speak. She describes how she was cleaning the priest's toilet when he tried to molest her. She goes on to tell him that as she screamed in terror, the priest emerged and said that an untouchable girl had polluted him. Bakha, furious, decides to search for the priest, but Sohini intervenes. They both decide to give up after realizing how powerless they are because of their caste's restrictions.

After sending Sohini home, Bakha walks to a neighbouring alley to beg for food. He begins yelling for food, but no one answers. He sleeps on the wooden platform in front of a caste Hindu's home since he is sick of the busy routine. When a Sadhu calls, a woman from a higher caste leaves the house. She yells at Bakha for contaminating her home. In exchange for a slice of bread, she asks him to clear the drain. In the meantime, he receives a chapatti from a woman who lives next door. When he gets home, he informs his father Lakha about the Pandit's abuse of Sohini and his own insult.

Lakha relates a painful event from his own life to ease his son's sadness. Bakha regains consciousness as a result. To meet his pals, he exits the house. He visits Havaladar Charat Singh to pick up a hockey stick after hanging out with his mates. Bakha plays hockey in the playground after becoming enthralled with his gentle care. After the match, a fight breaks out, injuring the son of a Hindu from a higher caste. Instead of expressing gratitude, Bakha's mother yells at him for defiling both her son and the house when he brings the injured kid to his home. . As he re-returns home in the afternoon, his father welcomes him with abuses for bunking his afternoon latrine cleaning work.

As Bakha transitions psychologically from ignorance to experience, he encounters an identity crisis. At first, he is unaware that he is an outcast. He feels better than other outcasts because of the white Tommies' generosity, and his attitude and appearance reflect this superiority complex. Unlike other scavengers, he does not lead a dirty or impolite life. He stands out from his fellow misfits due to his intelligence, sensitivity, and air of dignity. Charat Singh, a member of the upper caste, senses it. This man appeared clean, yet he belonged to a lower caste.

He refers to Bakha as a gentleman. However, a number of events that occurred in a single day undermine his image as a gentleman. He is not to blame for his suffering. He discovers who he really is after the high caste Brahmin slaps him for touching him and defiling him. He soon encounters another humiliating incident at the temple's stairs, which broadens his soul's horizons. However, the priest's abuse of his sister makes him furious, and he responds violently. The audience is frightened by the sweeper's enormous stride in the direction of the temple.

**Conclusion:**

Anand's characters are impoverished from birth. The protagonists' depressing circumstances and state of hopelessness force them to face the truth of romantic illusions of human existence. Under the long-standing colonial yoke of despair and debauchery, which resulted from the exploitation of colonial rulers and Indian elites that consistently rob people of their labour dignity and human values, they manage their own food. When his sister Sohini goes to the well to get water for her brother Bakha, she encounters humiliation in the community and the assault of the upper class. She is aware of her brother's fatigue and thirst. She waits for a long time to get a chance of collecting water as untouchables don't have their well. Through these depictions, untouchable exposes the hypocrisy of the Indian caste system and emphasizes the need for social reform. Anand contends that the "long-standing" caste system is the primary source of suffering and that remedies like education or the flush system—which would do away with the need for manual scavenging—are crucial. Last but not least, Anand brings the novel to a close with these suggestions to show that no single solution is sufficient, but rather a combination of social conscience, modernity and dignity is needed to liberate the marginalized.

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