



# A Saga of Stream of Consciousness: Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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## Abstract

The paper deconstructs segregation and subalternity which is the mostly altercate issue in the Indian Subcontinent, especially in the Nation of India, not only for its devout and lucrative code but also for its oppression to overcome the subalterns as well as the lower caste people in both ancient and modern Indian society. The novel *Untouchable* renders an extraordinary inception for the Indian English scribe to inspect a newish world of subalterns. It enunciates a expectancy both for the oppressed Hindus and India, fetching the philosophy of Bapu which struggles to raise the utmost sensation with the purpose of destroying the caste system as well as hierarchical dictation of the Indian traditional culture. They are the typical victims and muffled as they do not even have the economic and socio-political power to fight back against the upper-class people's sovereignty. They are not capable to get the voice to utter their disharmony and imprint themselves afore the world. These subalterns have very few feasibilities to switch their destiny in socio-economic periphery which is poised by the upper class and caulks the options like cognition, education and egalitarian rights to ameliorate their status.

**Keywords:** Marginalization, subjugation, suppression, Subaltern, untouchability, Stream of consciousness.

## Introduction

Subaltern is used in broad perspective as a synonym for minorities, subjugated women, refugees, colonial subjects, the illiterate, and children whose voices have been murdered. The Postcolonial writers have been trying to bring consciousness to the oppressed, marginalised or so-called Subalterns. This sensation can help them to move from vicinities to the centrum of the society. Subalternity is the most debated issue in the Indian Subcontinent, particularly in the Union of India, not only for its religious and economical code but also for its oppression to overcome the subalterns as well as the lower caste people in both ancient and modern Indian society. Originally, untouchability began with the religion of Hinduism and later it blew out into the origin of the Hindu societies in India. At every turn, the aristocratic bourgeoisie people like Brahmins, use the religion as a poisonous tool to defend a strongly demarcated structure of society to restrain the economically lower-class people. The hierarchical structure brings a caste system in practice which has been determined by one's profession inherited by birth. The status of subalterns is carried out mainly on the lower caste and lower-class people. They are the operable victims and they reckon with suppression as they do not have the economic and socio-political power to combat against the upper-class people's supremacy. They are not able to get the voice to speak out their condition and portray themselves before the world. The concept of subalternity not only casts the untouchables but all the intangible and discriminated entirety of people. These subalterns have very few feasibilities to switch their destiny in society which is poised by the upper class and caulks the options like

cognition, education and egalitarian rights to ameliorate their status. Literature is a tool that deconstructs and perfectly portrays the openness and the fight for subjugated people. Like other literatures from several places of the world, Indian English penmen have delineated those subaltern issues with exceptional attentiveness in their works.

Mulk Raj Anand is a remarkable English writer of his epoch. He belonged to the literal spectrum of the 'Big Three' of Indo-Anglian fiction. He brought forward his pen against the class and caste shemes of our nation during the decennary of 1930s. He took his birth on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar, the capital city of North West Frontier Province of India before the country's partition. He is envisaged as an extraordinary novelist for his extreme effort to limn the devoid and the subjugated people who are struggling for their identity. Mulk Raj Anand published his first novel *Untouchable* in 1935, which centralizes on the afflicted life of subalterns who struggled to transform their existing state by thrusting the core from the margin, but their endeavour falls apart when it comes to face reality. The depiction of the subalterns in this novel is the crucial subject to be analysed critically. Anand reverberated the tangible situation of Subalterns, their verve and historicity. In the Indian socio-cultural context, subalternity befalls on the radices of caste, class, creed and gender. The caste system has breathed a great demolition to the people of our nation. Under the British lex, the situation was not diverse. The caste system is deeply engraved in our nation from the time immemorial. Untouchability, a social evil, is a byproduct of the caste system. There are four premier castes in Hindu Society - the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishayas and the Sudras. The Brahmins represented the highest class in the society as they were considered the people almost near to God. The Kshatriyas were warriors and thus labelled the defenders of the country. In the caste hierarchy the Vaishayas occupied a position lower to the former and they were interested in money so said to be the producers of wealth. The Sudras were the labourers who performed menial jobs of sweeping, cleaning etc. The sweepers and scavengers were regarded as untouchables because of carrying out the filthy jobs. The sweepers and scavengers had to take away the human dung with their own hands and it was considered that a touch by a raker or a scavenger would have the offshoot of befouling a Hindu higher caste. Aforetime endeavors were begun with the most influential philosopher, Swami Vivekananda to eradicate this social sinister, who wrote: "*The caste system is opposed to the religion of Vedanta. Caste is a social custom and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste and every time it has only riveted the chains.*" (Vivekananda, 1983: 31)

*Untouchable* is a protest novel in which Mulk Raj Anand's method of attacking the social evil of the caste system invited the attention of the people. *Untouchable* deals with Bakha, an eighteen years old sweeper in pre-independence era. It also deconstructs the dejection of outcasts or working-class multitudes and their angst against the upper caste system. The character of subaltern Bakha is an idiosyncratic creation in the glebe of Indian English literature. Mulk Raj Anand fetches the subaltern Bakha to the microscopic anatomy and gives him a voice. He shows how Bakha, faces difficulties while he goes out from the separated slum (village) in which he lives to the city, the hostile and humiliating attitude of Brahmins, priest of the temple and all other upper caste people mishaps his impeccable heart. Bakha is shown not only suffering by physical humiliation but also by psychologically. The psychological torment and the physical humiliation to which Bakha is subjected, portrayed in a realistic manner. Bakha's miseries and pains are not because of his fault but of his birth in the subaltern class. He faces a lot of humiliation and oppression everywhere in his diurnal life. Wherever he goes, he is welcomed with the words, '*defiled*' and '*polluted*'. He wants to improve and to get his social status but he realises his subalternity when a betel-leaves-seller flung 'Red-Lamp' cigarettes at him as a "*butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing around the corner of his shop*" (Anand, 34), a confectioner threw a packet of jalebis at him like "*a cricket ball*" (Anand, 37) and a high-caste housewife throw away chapattis at him as if thrown at a dog. This subalternity makes him feel inferior everywhere. After getting chapattis Bakha comes back home and his father, Lakha, rebukes him as he attains few chapattis. Lakha, the father of Bakha, dreams of the past when he used to bring a lot of food from marriages. He is also recalling the past incident of how the Hakimji didn't allow him to enter his house, when he went for get medicine for his child. It happened only because Lakha belonged to untouchable caste as the caste had no permission to enter any high-caste house whether he is in any problem. Anand's humanitarian obtainment is very clear in the novel when Lakha recurred

his past experiences as: *“I tried to fall at the feet of every passerby and prayed to them to tell the Sarkar, your honour, that my child was suffering. But Sarkar this is the time of kindness, be compassionate at this time, another time you may take even my life. Only, save my child.”* (Anand, 73) Anand portrays how these subalterns were not allowed to enter the temples also. In the ‘Temple incident’ of the novel *Untouchable*, Bakha and his sister Sohini are being diversely accused of polluting the temple. Bakha is curious to know what has actually happened as he is not involved in any of the crimes. The calm and holy atmosphere is suddenly disturbed by the cry, *“Polluted! Polluted! Polluted!”* (Anand, 68) Bakha has been asked to get rid of the place by the congregation as: *“Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, dog! ... A temple can be polluted according to the Holy Books by a low-caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine.”* (Anand, 69-70)

### **Stream of Consciousness in Anand’s *Untouchable*:**

*Untouchable* is one of the most archaic examples in Indian English literature, which makes extensive use of stream of consciousness. Anand, through this narrative technique, attempts the fluid and eruptive nature of human thought which is anchored in the interior life of a character rather than the perspective of an objective third-person narrator. Thus, Anand’s novel begins with the thinking trance of Bakha. He thoughts uncongenial of his home as he lay half awake in the morning of an autumn day, covered by a greasy blanket. Even though, Anand is careful to mark changes of scene neatly, the readers have to keep their intellect about him in order to ensue the transitions that occur, when Anand moves from presenting the outer scene to presenting what is going on in Bakha’s mind.

*Untouchable* is a novel that reveals the mind, the inner being of a character. It does not follow the clock or calendar. It is flashed backward or forward. Now we are in the present, then we are sent back to the past and then all of a sudden the future creeps in. Instead of external action revealed through dialogue in the traditional novel, this novel concentrates on the internal action. Anand’s main emphasis in *Untouchable* is not on the action of the novel but on the way the mind of its hero works. He presents Bakha as a young sweeper boy with a highly sensitive type of temperament. He therefore, thinks and thinks on everything that happens to him. He is exposed to one humiliating incident after another in the course of an autumn day and is therefore, given to an unbroken process of thinking from dawn to dusk. The technique miraculously helps Anand to project the inner drama of his soul on the pages of his book. There could be no method more effective than it to apprise us with torments that an outcast in Indian society is destined to suffer on account of the murderous caste-system that we have so religiously been observing for more than two thousand years. The injury done by the caste system is not physical, it is in fact mental. It could be expressed by conversation, as follows: “Here is your portion”, said Ram Charan, Unfolding the handkerchief which he carried. There were three sugar-plums in it, all slightly broken: *“Throw me one”*, said Bakha. *Take it said Ram Charan. But Bakha hesitated and didn’t hold hands out. Take it, why don’t you take it? Ram Charan grumbled. “No, give it to me, throw it”, Bakha said.*” (Anand, 87) With this incident both Ram Charan and Chota were surprised. They had never seen before Bakha’s behaviour like that, when he touched a caste Hindu in the market of Bulashah. He earns for his transgression much abuse from the public and slap from the man he has polluted. The slap on cheek does not hurt physically but mentally gives more shock. The inside of Bakha is expressed with the help of his own soliloquies, which is a major technique of this type of fiction. *“Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why don’t I shout to warn the people of my approach? That comes of not looking after one’s work. I should have seen the high-caste people in the street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them. But why couldn’t I say something? Couldn’t I have joined my hands to him and then go away? The slap on my face! The liar! Let me come across him one day. He knows I was being abused. Not one of them spoke for me. The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused?”* (Anand, 43) The fantasies and nightmares of Bakha are also revealed to us. He had often felt like reading Waris Shah’s *Hir and Ranjah*. While he was in the British barracks, he had felt

a burning desire to speak tish-mish, tish-mish English. But his father told him that “schools were meant for the Babus, not for the lowly sweeper”. He had begun to work at the latrines at the age of six and resigned himself to the hereditary life of the croft, but he dreamed of becoming a sahib. He decided to self-educate. But his self-education hadn't proceeded beyond the alphabet.

While going to the marriage of Ram Charan's sister, Bakha's mind turns romantic. He remembered how, he had been playing with her brother and Chota in the barracks, they had come and started to play at marriage. Ram Charan's little sister was made to act as the wife because she wore a skirt. Bakha was chosen to play the husband because he was wearing the gold-embroidered cap. Bakha always felt proud of having once acted as her husband. When his thoughts darkened, he felt as if he could forcibly gather the girl in his embrace and ravish her. The working of Bakha's mind is also revealed through the technique of stream of consciousness at some places. When Rakha, Bakha's younger brother is away to barracks to fetch the left-over of the sepoy's launch, the hungry Lakha wistfully remembers the leftover of feasts that he had seen in the cantonment and the town. His mind travels to the great big piles of cooked food, which he had received on the occasion of marriage in the alleys of the city. There were fried bread and chingri puffs, vegetables, curries and semolina pudding, sweets and pickles. Even he recalled how the wooden box, where his wife kept sweets, was never empty that year. The flashback technique is also a major aspect of stream of consciousness technique in the novel. It is used to show the memories or feelings of the character. Lakha narrated his nasty experience to Bakha, when Bakha was ill with fever: *“Babu ji, Babu ji, God will make you prosperous. Please make my message reach the ears of the Hakim ji. I have been shouting, shouting and have even asked some people to tell the Hakim Sahib that I have a prayer to make to him. My child is suffering from fever. He has been unconscious since last night and I want the Hakim ji to give him some medicine.... Keep away, keep away,”* said the babu, *“don't come riding on at me. Do you want me to have another bath this morning? The Hakim Sahib has to attend to us people who go to offices first and there are so many of us waiting. You have nothing to do all day. Come another time or wait.”*(Anand, 71-72)

*Untouchable* is a ballad born out of freedom. *“I had tried to win for truth against the age-old lies of the Hindus by which they upheld discrimination. The profound thoughts of the upper orders in ancient India about caste were often noble. Someone in the great Mahabharata had cried “Caste, caste- There is no caste!” And I wanted to repeat this truth to the “dead souls” from the compassion of myself explanation in the various Hindu hells, in the hope that I would myself come clean after I had been through sewer, as it were.”* (Anand, 11) The use of the stream of consciousness bares before the readers the brushed mind and soul of Bakha, his fears and anxieties, his feelings and emotions, his ideas and reactions. Anand uses the stream of consciousness successfully, to show that, *“A Man is a man--- and he is born equal to all other men.”*

### Conclusion:

To sum up, we can undoubtedly speak that Mulk Raj Anand as social critic conveys a strong message through his novel *Untouchable* and raises the voice against caste segregation in the Indian society. He echoed the real situation of Subalterns, their mentality and reality. In the Indian cultural context, subalternity occurs on the basis of caste, class and gender. The caste system has played a great destruction to the people of our country. Although the Indian Government abolished the practice of untouchability by law but mental, social and traditional outlook of the people remained the same. India is also not free from the class system.

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