

Solutions for Eradicating Untouchability in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* a Critical Examination

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Abstract—Mulk Raj Anand's ground breaking novel *Untouchable* (1935) provides a searing portrayal of caste oppression through the eyes of Bakha, a young manual scavenger. This study analyzes the three potential solutions to untouchability presented in the novel: Christian conversion, Gandhian reform, and technological modernization. Through close textual analysis, the paper evaluates each approach's ideological basis, practical viability, and inherent limitations. The investigation reveals Anand's nuanced critique of these solutions—while acknowledging their partial merits, he ultimately suggests that no single approach can fully dismantle the deep-rooted caste system. The novel's enduring significance lies in this complex interrogation of social reform strategies, offering insights that remain relevant to contemporary discussions of caste discrimination.

Index Terms—Untouchability, Caste System, Social Reform, Dalit Literature, Colonial India Solutions for Eradicating Untouchability in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable: A Critical Examination* Dr Dakshayani G and Dr Mohan Prakash Associate Professors, Department of English University College of Arts, Tumakuru

I INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable" is a powerful novel that exposes the brutal realities of India's caste system, particularly the oppression faced by the Dalit community. Through the eyes of Bakha, a young sweeper, Anand reveals the daily humiliations and injustices endured by untouchables. The novel not only highlights Bakha's personal suffering but also explores possible ways to challenge and reform caste-based discrimination. By presenting different perspectives—from Conversion to Christianity, Gandhian ideals to technological solution—Anand pushes readers to think critically about how to end this deep-rooted social evil.

Conversion to Christianity: A Spiritual Escape

An and examines religious conversion as a possible escape from caste oppression. In the novel, a

Christian missionary offers Bakha hope, promising equality and dignity in Christianity. For a moment, Bakha sees this as a way out of his suffering—a chance to be free from the stigma of untouchability. However, this hope is shattered when he overhears the missionary's wife making casteist remarks. This moment exposes a harsh truth: even in a religion that preaches equality, deep-seated prejudices can persist. While conversion might offer spiritual comfort, it doesn't automatically erase caste-based discrimination in society.

Through this episode, Anand suggests that real liberation requires more than just changing one's religion. Systemic oppression cannot be overcome unless the mindset behind it changes. Conversion may provide temporary relief, but without broader social transformation, the chains of caste remain unbroken.

Gandhian Reform: Moral Persuasion

An and examines Gandhi's approach to ending untouchability through moral and spiritual reform. In the novel, Bakha listens to Gandhi's speech, where the leader condemns untouchability as a sin against humanity. Gandhi calls for social inclusion of Dalits but emphasizes self-improvement—asking them to adopt "cleaner" habits to gain acceptance.

While Bakha is initially moved by Gandhi's vision, he soon realizes a flaw: the burden of change falls on the oppressed, not the oppressors. This approach fails to challenge the caste system's power structures, focusing instead on individual morality rather than systemic injustice. Through Bakha's disillusionment, Anand critiques the limitations of Gandhian reform—moral appeals may inspire, but they cannot alone dismantle deep-rooted caste hierarchies.

Technological Advancement: The Flush System as a Symbol of Liberation

An and presents technology as another potential solution, symbolized by the flush toilet. A character, Iqbal Nath Sarshar, argues that modern sanitation could eliminate manual scavenging—the

degrading work imposed on Dalits like Bakha, thereby dismantling the occupational basis for untouchability. For Bakha, this idea sparks hope: machines might free him from the stigma tied to his labor. He is intrigued by this prospect, envisioning a future where his dignity is restored through the eradication of his degrading profession. Yet Anand reveals a deeper truth. While technology can remove the physical task (cleaning waste), it doesn't erase the casteist mindset that associates Dalits with "pollution." The flush toilet may end one form of oppression but leaves untouched the social contempt that sustains untouchability. Here, Anand balances optimism about progress with skepticism—technology addresses symptoms, not the disease of caste itself.

Persistence of Untouchability Today

Although untouchability was officially abolished in India by Article 17 of the Constitution, it still exists in hidden ways. Instead of open discrimination, it now takes more subtle, systemic forms. For example, manual scavenging—a job mostly forced upon Dalit communities—remains a reality despite being illegal. Recent deaths of manual scavengers in big cities show how caste-based labor divisions are still deeply rooted. As Anand writes in this novel, "They think we are dirt because we clean their dirt" (p. 52), showing how the stigma of "pollution" still ties a community to degrading work.

Technology, like the flush toilet, was seen in the novel as a way to end manual scavenging. A character named Iqbal Nath Sarshar talks about how modern sanitation could make the sweeper's job unnecessary. For Bakha, the protagonist, this is a hopeful idea: he imagines machines freeing him from his miserable work. However, while technology can remove the physical dirt, it doesn't erase caste-based ideas of purity and pollution. Critics argue that it only "cleans the nausea"—removes the disgust toward filth—but not the deeper disgust toward the people who do the work. In short, it fixes the symptom, not the real problem. Gandhi's approach, though slow, might offer a more lasting solution. By calling Dalits Harijans (children of God), he tried to change society's moral attitude toward them. In the novel, Gandhi says, "I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism," stressing the need for inner change. Unlike technology, which only changes external conditions, Gandhian reform aims to change people's minds and hearts. Bakha's hope at the end

of the novel, inspired by Gandhi's words, suggests that real change must come from a shift in people's beliefs. Anand remains doubtful but acknowledges that without a change in people's attitudes, true equality may never come: "There is no escape except through change in men's hearts."

II CONCLUSION:

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* continues to resonate as a profound literary intervention in the discourse on caste oppression. Through the character of Bakha, Anand interrogates the practicality and limitations of various proposed solutions—religious conversion, Gandhian moral reform, and technological modernity. While each of these offers glimpses of hope, none provides a comprehensive remedy. Conversion risks replicating caste prejudices in new religious settings; Gandhian ideals, though ethically powerful, tend to place the burden of reform on the oppressed rather than the system; and technological advances like the flush toilet, although symbolically liberating, fail to dismantle the social constructs of impurity and hierarchy. In the present context, even in an era of AI and smart cities, the persistence of manual scavenging and caste-based atrocities reveals that technological progress alone cannot wash away the stain of untouchability. As Anand subtly shows, social transformation must go beyond material change and aim at a psychological and ethical reorientation of society. His critique thus aligns with Ambedkar's structural vision and Gandhi's moral appeal—suggesting that both policy and conscience must work together.

Anand's contribution is not in offering a definitive solution but in provoking critical thought. His work calls on readers to recognize the complexity of caste and to resist simplistic fixes. In Bakha's journey, we find both despair and a faint glimmer of hope—a hope rooted not in machines or conversion, but in the transformation of human consciousness. As Anand declares through the quiet dignity of his protagonist: the real flush must occur in the minds of men.

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