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BAKHA AS A PREY TO SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION IN “UNTOUCHABLE” BY MULK RAJ  
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**ABSTRACT**

*Untouchable* is the first great sociological novel of Mulk Raj Anand, published in 1935. It is an epic of suffering, humiliation, discrimination, exploitation and social injustice. He is the central character in the novel. It revolves around his character. Everything is viewed from his point of view. He is a focused character and cynosure. The novel gives an account of single day event in the life of Bakha, a young sweeper boy of eighteen, strong and able bodied, the son of Lakha. His father is the Jamadar of all the sweepers in the town and the cantonment, and officially in charge of three rows of public latrines. Bakha inspired by the new influences which cause upheaval with him. He is also fascinated by the life and ways of India's English colonizers. Bakha is not simply an individual outcaste rather he represents the entire community of the outcaste treated as untouchables and subjected to live most miserably. The untouchable are segregated and discriminated against the rest of society. This portrays the untouchability of lower caste people and the deception of Bakha's family. He was bamboozled and beguiled in different places and situations.

**Keywords:** Denunciation, Humiliation, Hypocrisy, Exploitation, Deprivation, Decadence

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**INTRODUCTION**

Bakha, the protagonist, is hard-working, honest and punctual in his duty. He renders his services with conscience and devotion. He picks up his brush and basket and discharges his duty with unparalleled skill, efficiency and proficiency. Toilets glaze like mirror. He has to clean three rows of latrines which harden the muscles of his body. His dexterity wins him applause from the Havildar who remarks, "Ohe Bakhya you are transforming into a gentleman". But his remarks are tinged with malicious and sinister caste superiority that id an inseparable part of Hindu culture. He asks him to take a gift of hockey stick from him this afternoon. He is overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and betrays a humble smile. Master's offer obliges him beyond limitations. Bakha who inherits his obsequious manners from his forefathers. His sense of obsequiousness and

servility is the outcome of age long deprivation, indigence, penury and poverty. These are the elements which subdued to work doubles and he goes on working and working with the same sincerity and agility. For him his master's condescension is more a matter of pride than happiness.

'Ohe, Bakya! Ohe Bakya! Ohe scoundrel of a sweeper's son! Come and clean a latrine for me!'. Bakha is rudely awakened that morning to resume his routine work. He is sincere and punctual in his work though his father is always scolding him. He treats him with least affection and after his mother's demise his father become more ego-centric and egoist. Bakha's mother used to be compassionate, over-indulging. During his mother's life Bakha never realized any of his wishes unfulfilled. Havildar Charat Singh complains, "Why aren't the latrines clean, Ohe rogue of a Bakha? There is not one fit to go near. I have walked all rounds. Do you know you are responsible for my piles! I caught the contagion sitting on one of those dirty latrines!" he is generous, magnanimous and easy to placate. Bakha is very efficient and proficient at his work.

#### **Bakha is a Prey to Social Discrimination**

Bakha, who is young, smart, hardworking, has profound reverence for his own religion, Hinduism. But the irony is that he is being exploited and condemned to sub-human life by the custodians of Hindu traditional and cultural heritage. Caste Hindus avoid him because he can pollute them by touching them. So they have warned him to announce his arrival from a distance. He is a human being and expects nothing more than love and kindness from others particularly the caste Hindus. He has not the privilege of being treated as a human. His services for society are for not recognized, even when he saves the child from accident and brings him back to his mother who is caste Hindu. She does not thank him rather she scolds him for polluting. Besides excruciating and humiliating treatment, he continues to be theist. While hearing the holy chant he becomes overwhelmed by the mysterious spell. He enjoys a sort of divine trance with the rhythm of the song and his blood coursed along the melodic line. He surrenders before God with folded hands.

Trauma and humiliations seem to ceaseless and endless for Bakha who represents the outcaste Hindus subjected to untold miseries. Such heart rending scene is Chapatti-throwing. As usual Bakha collects crumbs and leftover food from the temple although he deserves his wages for the works he does for them. In spite of his vigorous and ceaseless hard work he gets abuses and insults. His cry falls on the deaf ears of the so called caste Hindus who treat him like dog and swine. The way Bakha collects his chapatti thrown by a woman who belongs to caste Hindu society is heat-rending. He collects the chapattis as if they were most sumptuous bread for him.

The hockey match in the evening between Bakha and his friends, is another dramatic scene in the novel. The two teams scheduled to play confront in the ground are 31<sup>st</sup> Punjabis and 38<sup>th</sup> Dogras which consists of the untouchable boys. The poor boys and untouchable boys depend on the mercy of the privileged *babus* and *sahibs*. Anand remarks, "Bakha gets a gift of a brand new fine hockey stick from Havildar Charat Singh, the same afternoon, a short while before the commencement of the match. He is in high spirits and even forgets traumatic experiences of the earlier part of the same day flourishing his hockey stick; he says to his friends that he would score no end of goals with it.

The zealous boys young and energetic enough, gather in the playground near the outcastes colony for the proposed match as the scheduled time for it approaches. A babu's pretty little son brings a new hockey stick for Chota, the virtual captain of his side. But Chota discourages and deprecates him by denying him entry in the team. The boy feels dismayed. Bakha comes to the front to defend him and pleads for him but fails. Bakha has for instinct of a reformer who is compelled by his inner urge to fight for the cause of the poor. But he has to suppress his benevolent urge because he belongs to the outcaste community. He sympathized with the poor the down trodden. The crowd of the boys in the field hopped to and fro like grasshoppers. There was no organization in the game they played. The rules of the game had hardly any meaning for them. When Bakha is about to win and drives the ball into the space between the posts and the goal keeper (of the opposite side) spitefully strikes a low on his (Bakha's) legs. The game at once turns into a fight. The boys of the two sides attack each other scratching, hitting, kicking, yelling, sticks and stones come in full use."

The babu's young little son gets wounded as a stone from Ram Charan's hand hit him badly on the head. Bakha gathers him in his strong arms as he is moved to see his head bleeding profusely and rushes to his home. Bakha expects that his mother would appreciate him for his noble and humanitarian deal but he is unnerved to see the manner his mother reciprocate his good deed, "you eater of your masters, you dirty sweeper. What have you done to my son?" Bakha is dejected and dismayed. He hands over the child and retreats.

E.M. Forster says in the forward to the novel, "The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disquieting as well as disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. It is sometimes said that he is so degraded that he doesn't mind, but this is not the opinion of their who have studied his case, nor is it borne out by my own slight testimony." Bakha is vanquished or defeated. The more he is humiliated, the more his potentiality rises. Bakha's protest against social discrimination cannot bring any revolution. He is an individual. He does not have favor of his own community while others have resigned themselves to the oppression and injustice, Bakha is optimist. But he has also accepted the existing social order because he cannot fight against the powerful caste Hindus.

#### **Conclusion**

An endless sequence of tyranny and cruelty and injustice has turned him anti-caste Hindus. He is eager to voice his protest but he has his own limitations and vulnerability. His birth in an outcaste family makes him defenseless. Being an outcaste boy he cannot think of justice and equality. He has to accept every act of injustice done by the caste Hindus as the will of the Almighty. Besides he submits to cruel and unjust traditions and rituals, his conscience does neither accept nor surrenders to social injustice. "The strength, the power of his giant body glistened with the desire for revenge in his eyes while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame. In a moment he had lost all his humility, he would have lost his temper too, but the man who had struck him below had slipped beyond reach into the street." Besides, his physical strength, intelligence, sensitivity and self-respect, he finds himself chained and defenceless because he is a sweeper so that he could become a prey to social injustice and discrimination.

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