

# The untouchable



A man may be an untouchable based on tradition. He may also be a slave or oppressed in any reason. But a man is born with free will, and he can change and be who ever he wishes to be. In the novel of Mulk Raj Anand entitled *The Untouchables*, Anand depicts the life for a day of an untouchable such as Bakha. The untouchables are part of the lowest class in the caste system in India as tainted by their birth. They have the lowest occupations and are discriminated and oppressed not just because of their poor state but also their weak intellectual ability. Other parts of the class are not supposed to touch them and they cannot even drink from the same water source as other Hindus, because they are considered to be polluted and dirty. It seems that in the story, Anand tried to give Bakha, the protagonist, a glimpse of hope for change. An example is when Bakha tried to wear some trousers just as the kind British Tommies that he worked for. Bakha for a moment believed that he could be better than his fellow outcasts; he was " possessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life" (Anand 11). At this part of the story, we could see how the main character actually had imagined, or perhaps had such a motivation to actually be someone other than an untouchable. Seeing how kind the Tommies actually treated him made him feel that he is not just another useless person in the world. But such dream is immediately dispersed when his community mocked his appearance. Through out the story we can see Bhaka's struggle and his silent rebellion. His complex character continues to evolve as he tries his best to find for other possible alternatives to remove his undesirable disgrace. He was given three possible choices to remove his untouchable status, first was to become a Christian, but he did not understand the " idea of being called a sinner" (130) nor did he grasp the idea of confessing his sins. Rather than accept the possible

change, he merely looks at the missionary's life as fairly miserable than him (40). Here we could see how Bakha is again accepting his status in life. When he encountered a man who tried to molest his sister, even if he had thoughts to actually hit the man and retaliate he rather chooses to reaffirm his status " I am an Untouchable! he said to himself, an Untouchable!"(52). The constant battle of Bakha against his quest for change is obvious. It seems that regardless of the change he wishes to make, he merely goes back to the beginning, accepting his fate as the lowest kind of man. Even the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi are foreign to him, and rather than see the same as a positive push for improvement, he looks at it as an insult (79). The third option lied in modern technology, the invention of the flush system in which Bakha believes to be the savior of his plight. The lack of education and the naiveness is very much seen on how Bakha hails on such invention. It seems that the psychology of the oppressed lies with self-conflict. The only hindrance for a better life is not limited to society's action but also the assurance by these people in accepting their fate. I believe that the author is trying to motivate and to push the " untouchables" to act against their oppressed life by properly earning their respect and not by a mere silent rebellion. Bakha is bound by his culture as it was narrated in the novel " 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). It seems that Bhaka's status is permanent unless the oppressors choose to free them of such discrimination or by situations beyond their grasp or control such as a higher being. But I must disagree, since their status although based on culture and religion can be changed through education. It is the lack of education and awareness that characters like Bakha also lose hope in having

a better life. It is accepting that such hardships are their fate because they are born to be untouchables. But education and awareness that can create change is not limited to the oppressed, but is also applicable to the oppressors for a free and equal society. Anand, Mulk Raj. Untouchable. London: Penguin, 1940. Print