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**S Sethumadhavan**  
Research Scholar, Bharathiar  
University, Tamil Nadu, India

**Dr. ST Gunasekhar**  
Research Supervisor,  
Bharathiar University, Tamil  
Nadu, India

## Untouchability as deadly sin in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand

S Sethumadhavan and Dr. ST Gunasekhar

### Abstract

Caste system generates the feeling of superiority or inferiority in the minds of the caste-based society, which takes the root for untouchability in the large Hindu society. It is an obtrusive factor of the Indian social organization. The low castes are deprived from their simplest and basic right. Mulk Raj Anand depicts the sufferings of the miserable lot of the unfortunate untouchables. He wants that they can be freed from the shackles of the upper caste people. He exposes vividly the evils of untouchability through his characters in his novels. The novel *Untouchable* records a day's events in Bakha's – the protagonist's – life. The Road is yet another novel of Anand which deals with untouchability. The protagonist of this novel, Bhiku, is an outcaste. Caste is the chief target of Anand's criticism in *The Road*. These events serve as a mirror to the pathetic conditions of the untouchables who form the lower stratum of the society in the caste-ridden orthodox Hindu society. Even today this social evil prevails in most part of India. The majority of Indian population is still under the influence of this 'hydra-headed monster'.

**Keywords:** association, demographic variables, practice, self care activities, structured teaching

### Introduction

Anand ascribes the evil of untouchability to religious fanaticism that exists in the Hindu religion. Hinduism is for the welfare of the entire mankind in its true sense. It sees no difference between one man and the other. It is for universal welfare. But when it is misconceived, it leads to a lot of wrong practices. One such is the evil of untouchability. Once, Mulk Raj Anand himself had to taste the bitterness of untouchability in his life. He was once segregated on board a ship by some Westerners and with a shock he realised what it meant to be an untouchable (The story of my Experiment with a White Lie: Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English 16).

His close observation of bitter ways, in his boyhood days, in which untouchables were treated, made him understand the pains of this cursed section of the society. His 'on-board' experience may be considered parallel to Gandhi's 'train incident' in South Africa in which he was pushed out of the train due to brutal racial discrimination. Anand's own experience, supported by his childhood observations, must have sown the seed for writing *Untouchable* for the social cause. His social commitment is very well revealed in the form of "a message for his culture in *Untouchable*." (Untouchable as an Archetypal Novel 10).

In *Untouchable*, he has chiefly dealt with the ghastly evil of untouchability afflicting the Hindu society of the pre-partition era, in the larger backdrop of the caste configurations within the Hindu society that has successfully stifled the healthy growth of a considerable section of Indian community for centuries. (Awakening Social Consciousness 93)

The Hindu religion during its transitional phase attached more importance to the concept of Varunashram Dharma. According to it, the society is categorized into four forms, namely, Brahamins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmin category represents priests, the Kshatriya includes warriors, the Vaishya includes merchants and the Shudra includes menial workers. The purpose of this categorization, originally, was to accelerate smoothly the entire society on the basis of the occupations of people. But in the passage of time, the main

**Correspondence**  
S Sethumadhavan  
Research Scholar, Bharathiar  
University, Tamil Nadu, India

purpose of Varunashram Dharma is forgotten and its soul is lost deliberately. The basic Hindu religious principle of Varunashram Dharma is totally sacrificed. Spiritualism, the real spirit of the Hindu religion, is substituted by ritualism. People who are more ritualistic and unclean, due to their occupations, constitute the lower caste stratum. The original classification of the Hindu religion based on the profession, mounted on the pedestal of spiritualism, is thrown in the bay with the passage of time.

The Hindu caste system, intended originally, perhaps, as an organisation to facilitate mutual cooperation among different sections of society eventually degenerated and petrified into an utterly divisive force with destructive efforts particularly on the untouchables, people who are considered too low and dirty to merit subsumption under any of the four castes. (Naik M.K. Mulk Raj Anand 97).

The Varunashram Dharma is basically intended to facilitate silky-soft cooperation among the people in the society. But, in spite of this constructive effect, it had a destructive bearing on the unclean people and branded them as untouchables. Thus, a new category called untouchables came into existence in the transitional phase of the Hindu religion. People who are clean and ritual are called higher caste Hindus and those who are unclean, such as sweepers, scavengers, cobblers and others, just because of their occupations and with no connection to any rituals, are called low-caste Hindus or untouchables. A distinct line of demarcation came into being and a clear-cut discriminating mechanism started thereby. The caste Hindus are considered to be near God and the untouchables are considered to be far away from God. A touch or a sight of these untouchables is deemed to defile the sanctity of the upper caste people. As such, the untouchables started living in hamlets situated too far away from the residential areas of the caste Hindus. The untouchables, in the perception of the upper caste Hindus, are outcastes, sub human, third-rated, and have no dignity at all.

Anand is a staunch believer of humanistic values. He wants everyone to be treated equally with dignity.

A strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, Anand is naturally shocked by the inhuman way the untouchables are treated by those that belong to superior castes especially the Brahmins or the so-called 'twice-born. (Awakening Social Consciousness 97)

He is surprised to see the ill-treatment meted out to the untouchables in the hands of the upper caste people. He hates this social evil and discrimination and various rungs in the social ladder. He is a believer of equality. He wishes everyone to get his/her share of social respect and dignity.

Untouchable is a focus on class distinctions between the high caste Hindus and the dregs of humanity known as untouchables, which hampers the growth of individuals, which ultimately results in social evils. He hated social institutions, which cause the cleavage between the different strata in the social structure. (The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand 105)

Untouchability is an age-old social stigma. The social evil of

untouchability found its way into the Hindu religion due to misconceived Varunashram Dharma. According to M.K. Naik,

The caste Hindu is armed with the feeling of six thousand years of social and class superiority – a feeling which refuses to accept the fact that the untouchable is a human being but insists on treating him like a sub-human creature, to be ignored or bullied or exploited as the occasion demands. (Naik, M.K: Mulk Raj Anand 29)

Anand is very keen to bring out the division that exists in the society in the very opening of his first novel *Untouchable*.

The opening paragraph of the novel epitomizes the 'big divide' between the untouchable and other resident communities in the town. (Awakening Social Consciousness 95)

E.M. Forster expresses his hope that there is a change at hand with regard to the emancipation of the untouchables. In his preface to *Untouchable* he says.

The book is simply planned but it has form. The action occupies one day and takes place in a small area. The great catastrophe of the 'touching' (p.46) occurs in the morning and poisons, all that happens subsequently, even such pleasant episodes as the hockey match and the country walk. After a jagged course of ups and downs, we come to the solution, or rather to the three solutions, with which the book closes..... Bakha returns to his father and his wretched bed thinking now of the Mahatma now of the Machine. His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it but on the surface of the earth, if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand. (Forster, E.M. Preface to *Untouchable*).

M.K. Gandhi views untouchability thus:

I regard untouchability, the Mahatma was saying, as the greatest blot on Hinduism. (Critical Response to V.S. Naipaul & Mulk Raj Anand 106)

Untouchability is the characteristic factor of the Hindu society. This unwanted social evil is exclusive only to the Hindu religion on the earth. M.K. Gandhi observes:

If untouchability was part of the Hindu Creed, I should decline to call myself a Hindu. Fortunately for me, I hold that untouchability is not a part of Hinduism. (Caste Conflicts in Mulk Raj Anand's Major Novel 34)

Anand too expresses his opinion

"... untouchability was not sanctioned by religion and that it was impossible that it should be so" in his fax message sent to Jaydeep Sarangi, the author of *Indianness: A study of Coolie and Untouchable*. (Critical Response to V.S. Naipaul & Mulk Raj Anand 106)

Social inequality is a key note of the caste system. Caste is

the very core of the Hindu religion. Caste system is an inseparable factor in the Hindu religion.

The spell of caste is so thick and inescapable that even nearly half a century after *Untouchable* appeared, the evil of untouchability prevails, despite legislative action taken to root it out, and that is the reason why the novel still has an appeal of its own. (The Rigidity of Caste System 13)

Saroj Cowasjee notes with pain:

Though the Indian Constitution has made it a crime to practise untouchability, there are still 60 million people in India who are discriminated against. (Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable: An Appraisal* 28)

Gandhi protested against the issue of considering the untouchable as the separate lot from Hindus. This historical fact is nicely interwoven in the novel *Untouchable* (Dalits in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Joseph & Macwan's *Angaliyat* 123)

In his public speech in *Untouchable*, Gandhi says:

I shall only speak about the so-called 'untouchables' whom the government tried to alienate from Hinduism by giving them a separate legal and political status. For me the question of these people is moral and religious. When I undertook to fast unto death for their sake, it was in obedience to the call of my conscience. (UT 136)

Gandhi further speaks:

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an Untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition. (Ibid 138)

Gandhi is the Messiah of the untouchables. They expect him to come and set them free.

In a comparative study between Anand's *Untouchable* and Thakazhi Sivasankaran Pillai's *The Scavenger's Son*, C.P. Sadasivam brings out the similarities of these two novels. According to him,

Both these novels have, as their theme, the life of scavengers belonging to the lowest stratum of the Indian society. (Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Thakazhi's *The Scavenger's Son* 53)

He appreciates the revolution led by Anand for the cause on untouchables.

It was a great literary revolution that Mulk Raj Anand spearheaded in the history of Indian novel with the publication of the life of an untouchable scavenger (Ibid 53)

Needless to say, social commitment is the hallmark of both these novels. (Ibid 57)

He goes on to praise both the authors for their social commitment.

In 1932, while perusing the pages of Gandhiji's magazine *Young India*, he was impressed by Gandhi's narrative about a sweeper called Uka, and decided to meet the Mahatma and to read him his novel. (So Many Freedoms 42)

Anand was curious to meet the Mahatma at the Sabarmathi Ashram and he had the opportunity of being with the Mahatma. In the ashram, he was asked to attend to all the work as others did including toilet cleaning once in a week. Originally Anand wrote the novel for 250 pages but it was reduced to 150 pages by Gandhiji by editing the unwanted pages as he felt so. Bakha, the hero of the novel *Untouchable*, is an eighteen-year-old lad. He is a latrine cleaner and a sincere and hard worker. Anand says:

The toil of the body had built up for him a very fine physique. It seemed to suit him, to give homogeneity, a wonderful wholeness to his body, so that you could turn around and say, 'Here is a man'. (UT 11)

Saros Cowasjee describes him as 'an attractive person whose physique is distinctive'. (So Many Freedoms 48)

Bakha does the duty latrine cleaning with devotion. His experience as an untouchable, throughout the day, goes beyond description. He is ill treated by the caste Hindus. The incidents that humiliate him follow one another. Bakha stops at a roadside shop and asks for a pocket of 'Red Lamp' cigarettes. The shopkeeper sprinkles water on the coin given by Bakha and throws a cigarette packet at him.

.....as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing around the corner of his shop (UT 46)

Having understood his position as an untouchable, he moves on to a sweetmeat stall. He wants to buy jilebis. Here also the shopkeeper washes his coin and throws the sweet packet to him. Bakha is very much tempted to eat the jilebis. His taste buds induce him to eat them at once. When he puts a piece into his mouth, he forgets the surrounding. Unknowingly, he touches a Lalaji, which is the biggest crime in those days. It is a deadly sin. A big crowd comprising caste-Hindus gathers there. They abuse him in words, which one cannot express. They call him a dirty dog and the son of a bitch. Bakha begs pardon to the Lalaji. But the Lalaji is not ready to pardon him. Nevertheless, he collects all his anger at his hand and slaps on Bakha's cheek. Bakha felt very much humiliated. Being a strong young lad, he could have retaliated and slapped the Lalaji. However, his habitual subservience did not allow him in to do so.

But then he realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulder would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants, but a normal one. (UT 35)

Though he is strong enough to revolt, the centuries-old submission to caste-Hindus prevented him from reacting.

In his almost physical inability to revolt, his submission, his habitual subservience to superiors who insult him, he is one with the vast majority of the outcasts. (So Many Freedoms 52)

The Temple incident adds salt to the wound of Bakha. The priest tries to molest Sohni, a good-looking sister of Bakha, at the temple premises by pretending to offer her water. When she shouts, the cunning priest escapes from this ugly situation by throwing blame on her. He lies that she touches and defiles him. Bakha knows the entire episode and his very much infuriated.

“I will go and kill him,” bursts out Bakha. Lakha, his father, appeases the anger of Bakha. “No, no, my son, no.... we can’t do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient against all that we might say before the police.” (UT 88)

It is clear that the father accepts traditional practice while the son does not accept. The degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate section of society is highlighted through the oft-repeated refrain of Bakha ‘posh, posh, posh, sweeper coming’ in order to alert the upper caste people from being defiled by his touch.

The very fact that they were not allowed to mount the platform of ‘the caste-well’ and had to wait sometimes for hours together for the generosity of some caste-Hindu to pour water in their empty pitchers speaks volumes about how deep-rooted this evil had become. (Awakening Social Consciousness 97)

Bakha’s experience in the silversmith’s lane is yet another tale. A housewife becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of the house and scolds him ‘perish and die’ as he has defiled her house. He appeals for forgiveness and asks for food. She flings some chapattis as if giving them to a dog. They fall on the place where her son is relieving himself. Bakha collects the chapattis from the floor with a heavy heart.

In the hockey match incident also Bakha is very much humiliated. He plays hockey with two boys of the Hindu Babu. One of the boys, the younger one, is injured. Bakha carries the boy to the boy’s house due to his love and affection for him. He forgets his mistake of touching the boy as his heart is filled with compassion for fellow beings. In spite of appreciating Bakha for his human act, the mother scolds him for having touched her son. Bakha is very much insulted. He sees his tragedy vividly and understands his position in the society.

The instinctive anger gives way and the slave in him asserts itself. (So Many Freedoms 52)

E.M. Forster in his Preface brings out the pathetic plight of the untouchables:

The sweeper (Untouchable in this case) is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free but the scavenger is bound for ever both 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 a 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. (Preface to Untouchable vi)

With booming rage in his mind, Bakha asks himself why the Hindus treat him in such an abusive and insulting manner. He is moved by the sympathy and kindness of the Mohammedan tonga-wallah. He also wonders why the Sahibs and Muslims do not mind touching them. The cruelty and orthodoxy of the Hindus is thus sharply focussed.

These factors, Anand seems to hint, are the probable reasons for the conversion of a large number of low-caste Hindus to Christianity. (Awakening Social Consciousness 100-101)

Saros Cowasjee attacks this social stigma so:

Orthodox Hindus who worship a stinking bull will not touch a human being; Hindu temples’ doors are closed to those who keep their grounds clean. (So Many Freedoms 55)

This is what exactly happens to Bakha when he is shouted at in the temple when he curiously tries to have a glance at the idol of God. When Bakha is humanely consoled by the Mohammedan tonga-wallah and when Havildar Charat Singh offers him tea in his own tumbler and gives him a hockey-stick. Bakha gets melted. He says:

For this man, I wouldn’t mind being a sweeper all my life. I would do anything for him. (UT 87)

Anand’s crystal clear picturisation spins around the problem of untouchability throughout the novel.

If we analyse these incidents of Bakha’s life, it is very much clear that Anand’s depiction revolves around the problem of untouchability practised by the Hindu castes. (A comparative study of Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable and Sharan Kumar Limbale’s Akkaramashi 140)

For fault or no fault, the untouchables had to receive the abuse and rebuke of the caste men as daily food.

The writer (Anand) perhaps tries to underline the irony, the pity of situation, that is, how a noble soul, an honest and efficient worker, and a lovable boy like Bakha has to face all kinds of insult and humiliation only because he is an untouchable. (Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable: An Appraisal 53).

The society, on the one hand, does not allow him to be an effective and rightful member of it and, on the other hand, does not release him from it.

Bakha is both isolated from and bound to his culture: it will not allow him fully to participate in the society and it cannot release him from it because of the essential service he performs for it. (Untouchable as an Archetypal Novel 9).

It is ironical to note that while the society requires his

essential service, it will not allow him the rightful share, which he deserves.

Bakha's hope-hope of the hopeless-for a remedy drives him vis-a-vis with three possible solutions. They are: Christianity, Gandhism and Modernization. Bakha meets Colonel Hutchinson of the Salvation Army, the organ striving for converting lower caste Hindus to Christianity. Bakha is fascinated to meet this White Sahib who is even more superior to a caste-Hindu. Hutchinson believes strongly in conversion and goads Bakha to embrace Christianity. The Colonel tries to impress and speak to Bakha emotionally. He speaks why Bakha is to become a Christian. However, Bakha is not satisfied with the explanation of Hutchinson that Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for the sake of the poor and the rich. The description of the Colonel on the crucifixion of Jesus is not convincing to Bakha. The concept that Jesus died for both poor and the rich does not carry weight and holds good for Bakha. Hutchinson's efforts to convert Bakha to Christianity do not succeed. His zealous delivery on Christianity does not take Bakha to the very core of his miseries. Bakha is very much confused and runs away from the Colonel.

The Colonel's proselytizing zeal and blundering humanitarianism only confuse and repel Bakha who runs away from him. (Naik, M.K. Mulk Raj Anand 34)

Bakha happens to hear the public speech of Mahatma Gandhi. He is very much attracted by it as Gandhi speaks exclusively about untouchability. He mentions untouchability as a blot on Hinduism. He calls the untouchables 'Harijans' (people of God). It is a big consolation to Bakha as he is a 'Harijan'. He feels that Gandhi is a revolutionary in calling the untouchables Harijan. Gandhi's mention of untouchability as a blot on the Hindu religion convinced Bakha. Gandhi's approach to eradicate untouchability is two-fold. As the first one, he stresses upon the dignity of labour. He says all kinds of work are equal. None is superior to the other. To prove this, he engages himself in cleaning latrines. Secondly, Gandhi suggests to the untouchables to get rid of bad habits and be clean.

In order to emancipate themselves, they should purify themselves. They have to rid themselves of evil habits like drinking liquor and carrion eating. (UT 163)

Bakha seems to be happy with the Mahatma's concepts of none is superior and no work is mean. But he doubts Gandhi's ideas for emancipation as he advises to give up drinking liquor. The Mahatma's influence on him is thread bearing. Bakha becomes spell-bound on the very sight of the Mahatma.

The Mahatma raised his right arm from the folds of his shawl and blessed the crowd with a gentle benediction. The babble of voices died out, as if he had sent an electric shock through the mass of humanity gathered at his feet. This strange man seemed to have genius that cloud, by a single dramatic act, rally multi-coloured, multi-tongued India to himself. (UT 160-161)

Bakha now listens to the speech of the poet Iqbal Singh Sarshar. The poet suggests a modern flush system for the

total eradication of untouchability.

Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless society. (UT 158)

The 'machine', which the poet tells about, cleans dung without any one to handle it. The flush system helps returning to

... the modified culture in which one is born – a purified Hinduism which can incorporate aspects of Western Culture, such as the flush system. (UT 159)

Bakha is very much delighted on the introduction of 'machines' to remove human soil. Saros Cowasjee observes:

But the mention of a 'machine' which cleans dung and which would enable a sweeper to change his profession so that he would no longer be thought of as an untouchable grips his attention. (So Many Freedoms 59) Anand does not pronounce upon any of the three solutions offered but is able to achieve his effects through a deft portrayal of Bakha's incipient revolt of arousing the social conscience against the curse of untouchability. (Protest in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand 134)

As E.M. Forster points out in his preface, 'a change is at hand'. With this hope the day's experience of Bakha comes to halt. The novel ends with the possibility of better future for the impugned untouchables such as Bakha. Certainly Hutchinson, Gandhi and the poet have provided much solace for Bakha. He feels relieved of his humiliation and he also feels optimistic of getting rid of cleaning the dirt of the people.

*The Road* is another novel of Anand which treats untouchability. The protagonist of this novel, Bhiku, is an outcaste. Caste is the main object of Anand's criticism in *The Road*. According to Rama Jha,

Anand takes up more directly the theme and character of 'Untouchable' once again in the context of politically free India. (Gandhian thought and Indo-Anglian Novelist 82)

People's mindset regarding untouchability has not changed even with the passage of time. M.K.Naik opines:

Though the novel *The Road* written twenty –six years after Anand wrote *Untouchable*, people's minds had not changed and the old caste taboos exercised their despotic authority and influence. (Mulk Raj Anand 36)

Anand narrates the story of Bhiku and his Harijan friends who build a road for the government and come into conflict with caste Hindus who do not want to touch the stones defiled by the so-called chamars.

A group of outcastes is working to build the road under the leadership of a sympathetic caste-Hindu in the village Govardhan. The road will help them transport milk to the nearby towns easily. But some higher caste men refuse to touch these 'polluted' stones handled by the outcaste labour.

The landlord Thakur Singh is jealous of the untouchables for the reason that they have now started earning wages. Their earning will bring him disrespect from them. He does not want them to earn money. So he collects all his strength to prevent their earning. He employs various ways to block their progress but all his efforts end in vain. The untouchables are not frightened by Thakur Singh's cunning plans; instead, they successfully complete the laying of the road with the help of the government. At the end of the novel the hero Bhiku, tired by the caste-hatred in the village, moves away along the new road to Delhi, a place where people are too busy and 'no one knew who he was and where would be no caste or outcaste' (The Road 96). Thus the road to Delhi may be conceived as the road to freedom from caste ridden society and its evils especially untouchability. The migration of Bhiku may be considered as a romantic idea but the migration of untouchables to towns or cities for their betterment is a reality.

In *The Road* it is mainly vanity and ego problems that we face. Thakur Singh, the landlord, makes efforts to prevent the Harijans from constructing a road. (The Road: A Fresh Appraisal 210)

Since they are untouchables, Thakur, does not like to witness their economic progress. The untouchables accomplish their task of road-building despite the upper-handedness of the higher caste people.

*The Road* is a novel of achievement in more senses than one: the construction of the road despite obstructions, the humiliation of high caste Hindus, and the coming of a new sense of direction. (Ibid 210)

Anand dreams of a new remedial measure to the social evil-untouchability. The protagonist, Bikku, strongly believes that concerted and organized work and action of the untouchables will emancipate them. He wants all untouchables will emancipate them. He wants all untouchables to cooperate and work together in an orchestrated manner to wipe out untouchability from the surface of the earth. He strongly hopes that a coordinated enterprise will emancipate them from this social malice.

Strong and sincere but calm, he was spiritually too pure to hate and had learnt through long submission, to endure evil and violence from upper castes, without protest, only hoping that through work and more work, he would be liberated, somehow, he did now know how. (TR 45)

Anand emphasizes through Bhiku that work is a source for liberation from indignity. He emphatically stresses the golden principle 'work is worship' through Bikku. Bikku loves to sing the song of Kabir forever, which highlights the fruits of work and action. Work, work, devoted ones, for through work all sins are washed away by the earth and sweat. (Mulk Raj Anand, A study of his Fiction in Humanistic Perspective 34)

Bhiku's new approach of gathering people to build a road is quite appealing. Though the result, that is the emancipation of the untouchables, is seen a bit too far away, it is quite sure that there is a result at the end of

the road. "Thus he is engaged in a meaningful social action." (Naik, M.K : Mulk Raj Anand 73)

All the upper caste people are not equally harsh. There are some exceptions too. They are possessed with hearts filled with sympathy for fellow human beings. They do not mind whether they are touchables or untouchables. Havildar Charat Singh tells about good-hearted caste Hindus.

They have, however, a powerful ally in Dhooli Singh, who helps them continually, at the cost of alienation from his caste and from his family. (Ibid 74)

Anand stands for modernity to set free all untouchables from the clutches of upper caste people. The social stigma, untouchability, is 6000 years old. However, some relief and hope can be seen if machines bring salvation. Balarama Gupta says:

Anand's prediction for the machine, which he believes is a potent instrument in paving the road for man's prosperity, is an idea just hinted at in *Untouchable*, but it finds clearer expression in *The Road* wherein the outcastes take the help of a road engine to complete the construction of the road. (The Road: A Fresh Appraisal 210)

The cruel shackles of untouchability are vividly seen in *The Road* when Sanju, the son of Thakur Singh, who is the "highest of the village by caste and rank and ownership of twenty acres of land" does not allow Lakshmi, the mother of Bhikku, to enter the temple as she is a low-born woman from the chamar community. When Rukmani, the mother of Sanju, gave Bhikku water in a brass vessel, Sanju fiercely shouts, "Bhikku Chamar! ..... How can you touch the brass cup and soil it for ever! Have you not thought of your status?" (The Road 95) This clearly reflects what is in the minds of the upper caste people. They have in mind nothing but arrogance and suppressive attitude towards untouchables. However, Bhiku controls his anger. Instantly he remembers he is a chamar, an untouchable.

Anand's emotional involvement in the problem of untouchability is evident in his letter to Cowasjee. He writes:

There was something tragic-comic to me in the fact the caste Hindus would not touch the stones quarried by the untouchables to make the road because the stones had been touched by the untouchables. (The Rigidity of Caste System 20)

Bhiku leaves for Delhi in search of liberation from the crisis of untouchability. He is unable to carry all social evils with him. He is to leave every evil in the village itself.

*The Road* is seen as a panacea to all social ills. Bhiku leaves the village, it is true, but he leaves behind the still-pestering ailments, the still-warring caste and class conflicts and the still-alive atmosphere of narrowness and superstition. (Review of the Road 419-420)

**As K.N. Sinha says**

It is evident that Bhikku works at his own salvation with

diligence. The Road thus stands for the way out of hell one has built for himself. Bhikhu visualizes a heaven, which may not yet be attainable, for custom, superstition and habit hang like a dead weight clouding one's vision. The golden dream of a classless society may remain in the realm of possibility. (Mulk Raj Anand 75)

Lakshmi, Bhikhu's mother, asks him not to oppose the caste Hindus. She believes in Karma and fatalism. She has a strong religious faith. She hopes that good deeds will elevate the low-born people to a higher status. But Bhikhu stands at the other end of the tunnel. He believes in hard work and human efforts. For him God has nothing to do with human problems. The Karma theory has no place in Bhikhu's book of life.

### The Road stands as a symbol

(a) The Road is a symbolic protest against the concepts of Karma and fatalism. (b) The Road is symbolic of the use of machine, which lessens the drudgery of Harijans. (c) The Road represents a period of transition where the old order of the Hindu beliefs in untouchability will change yielding place to a new vision to the time-gap needed for the change in human mind for the vision of the coming together of the Harijans and the caste Hindus. (e) The Road is symbolic of a speculative state to wish for the disappearance of custom, habit and superstition. (f) The Road symbolises the golden dream of unity between the Harijans and the caste-Hindus, which will become a reality one day. (Voice of the Voiceless 100)

Anand considers the social evil of untouchability as the worst form of all evils. He knows pretty well that this is originally not the part of the Hindu religion. This stigma has been its way into the Hindu religion only in the middle phase during transition. The clean people consider people who are dirty and unclean because of their occupation as untouchables and in course of time a new community comprising untouchables came into a remedy to this menace. This is what happens in the life of Bakha. He is perplexed on hearing the speech of Colonel Hutchinson who persuades him to embrace Christianity. Anand knows well that the shadow of untouchability will certainly follow the individual even after conversion. He and Gandhi go hand-in-hand in providing a very good status for the untouchables in the society. Gandhi calls them Harijans. It is a glorifying act. By calling them so, they will be respected and very well regarded as worthy human beings. Untouchables should purify themselves. They should develop clean habits and do away with bad habits like drinking alcohol. Anand feels that modernization will make their work easy, turn them to cleanliness and bring them dignity. The machine - the flush system - suggested by the poet is a good example to this concept. The scavengers need not handle human dung. They are disregarded and not touched by others since they remove dung. When the flush system is introduced, they need not touch dung and they will be freed from the wretched occupation of latrine cleaning. If they give up the scavenging work, they will surely look neat and tidy. They will see their way into the community of 'touchable'. Mechanization, modernization and industrialization will convert the untouchables into touchables.

Anand suggests yet another type of remedy to the social menace of untouchability in his novel *The Road*. He feels that concerted work and action will eradicate untouchability. The Protagonist, Bhikhu, unifies the force of the untouchables in constructing the road. The upper caste people are reluctant to touch the stones mined and brought by the untouchables. Bhikhu, feels that their dignity and revival lies in their diligent work. They should work for their social liberation. Bhikhu takes the help of machines in the task of laying the road. The more the caste Hindus are against them, the more the untouchables become stronger in mind and action. The use of a road engine expedites the completion of the road. Work is life and laziness is death. Work will bring prosperity and economic growth to the untouchables. Economic freedom will equalize their status with the caste Hindus. The untouchable gaining economic prosperity is not relished by the upper cast people. They are afraid that the road will make the untouchables prosper and so they are irritated to see the road laid by the untouchables. They want the untouchables to be always under their shackles and control. However, the road is completed and Anand gives a message to the untouchables through Bhikhu. There is surely a road to economic freedom if they work in a unified and coordinated way.

Anand attributes unclean habits and occupation such as toilet-cleaning to the social stigma of untouchability. He believes that the introduction of modern gadgets in the occupation of scavengers will bring back their lost dignity. He also suggests that the economic prosperity of the untouchables is possible through unified hard work. Concerted diligence brings economic freedom to them and thereby they raise their living standards, which lead to liberation from the evil of untouchability.

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