



## A comparative study between Mulk Raj Anand and Mahatma Gandhi over untouchability

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### Abstract

In the early decades of the twentieth century, writers felt deeply inspired by Gandhi, Marx and Freud. But Gandhi's influence on Indian writers was most direct and significant. Gandhi is indeed one of the most direct and significant. Gandhi is indeed one of the most significant and influential figures of the present century. The primary objective of this topic is to understand the emerging picture of the Indian nation in the colonial period as it appears in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. In the novel, Anand focuses on the three given religions- Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. In addition to these is the fourth-preached by Gandhiji- the religion of humanity.

**Keywords:** Influence, significant, untouchable, religion, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, humanity, colonial

### Introduction

#### Gandhian Ideology

Gandhi stripped urban life of its pretentiousness and stressed that religion without compassion and culture without conscience were worthless. He wanted the writers to abandon their futile adulation of the past and boldly face the reality of India as she was. Gandhi served as a beacon of light to the Indian intelligentsia, enlarging their mental horizon and adding a new dimension to their thinking.

#### Gandhi in Indian Fiction

The independence struggle traversed boundaries of language and community, involving the whole nation in the movement. India's struggle for freedom is a popular theme in Indian fiction. Prem Chand, the noted Hindi novelist, was immensely inspired by Gandhi. To put the Gandhian thought into practice, he resigned his government job and settled down in a village to experience the rural life in all its simplicity and austerity, and write about it. In *Untouchable* (1935) and *The Sword and the Sickle*, Mulk Raj Anand brings him in as the Central character in the plot.

Gandhi's Speech on Untouchability in the Novel *Mahatma* Gandhi is held in high respect by the people in the novel *Untouchable*. A large crowd gathered in the *golbagh* to listen to the great man whose arrival is greeted with the words: "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai." The crowd is shouting Gandhi's name which has a magic effect upon Bakha who does not know anything about the great man but who has certainly heard his name and the word 'Mahatma' in this connection.

Bekha eagerly recalls all that he had heard of this man. People had said that Gandhi was a saint, that he was an avatar or an incarnation of the Gods Vishnu and Krishna. Gandhiji further urges the sweeper to stop accepting the leftovers of the meals of high caste Hindus. The sweepers should accept only wholesome grains and not the rotten grains.

Gandhiji's lecture contains the second possible solution to Bakha's problem and to the problem of the entire class of sweepers and scavengers. The other two solutions are proposed by Colonel Hutchinson and the poet Iqbal Nath.

#### Mulk Raj Anand's views on Untouchability

#### The Picture of a Fragmented Nation

A cursory reading of the text makes it obvious that *Untouchable* does not directly deal with the complexities of nationalism. But in presenting the life of Bakha, an untouchable, the novel shows that the idea of Indian nation/national culture emerging in the colonial period failed to include within its body the whole of the demographic mass that is claimed to represent.

The exclusion of the lower castes shows the gaps in the model of the nation based on privileging an essential tradition: on the one hand a bulk of the population does not figure in the model of the nation and, on the other hand, the dominant Hindu religion faces a threat from within, since exclusion of the lower castes forces the formation of a possible alliance of the lower caste Hindus with the Muslims and the Christians.

#### Hinduism

It is significant that Bakha is constricted by a 'moral' hindrance and by a nation of defilement. Both concepts are products of orthodox Hinduism which misinterprets the caste system invented by the Aryans. What had begun as a classification based on the type of work performed by individuals, eventually decayed into a rigid stratification with the Brahmins forming the top of the pyramid, followed by the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, with the Shudras forming the base.

The contradiction inherent in the practice of untouchability are highlighted through Bakha's interactions with different sections of Indian society.

#### Islam

Though the novel is dominated by a Hindu population, considerable space is given to the Muslims. The empathy with Bakha, technically a Hindu lower-caste, feels with the Muslims 'whom the Hindus considered outcasts and who were therefore much nearer him.' Bakha's response to the event is in keeping with his original empathy towards the Muslims: "the *tonga-wallah* was kind. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadan and the Sahibs.

### **Christianity**

The third segment of the population, of Bulandshar, is composed of the 'sahibs' in the cantonment Bakha's interaction with the "tommies," occasioned by his employment in the barracks of the British regiment, offers him an avenue to see himself as something other than an untouchable. We are told: "The Tommies treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow outcastes."

Mulk Raj Anand introduces the Christian angle in the novel through the comico pathetic figure of colonel Hutchinson chief of the local salvation Army. A true believe in his cause of saving souls, colonel Hutchinson is a propagator of conversion.

### **The Region of Humanity**

It was as if the crowd had determined to crush everything, however ancient or beautiful, that lay in their achievement of all that Gandhiji stood for. It was as if they knew, by an instinct surer than that of conscious knowledge, that the things of the old decadence must be destroyed in order to make room for those of now.

Gandhiji's view on Untouchability are clearly defined in the novel. In his speech, Gandhi observes. But Gandhi's views are not accepted in toto. The poet at the end of the novel, even while he accepts Gandhi's views on most subjects, questions Gandhi's stance vis-à-vis the introduction of machine in India. By calling the outcastes "Harijan" the children of God-Gandhiji was striving to unite a sundered limb of Indian society to its body for achieving more effective social & political ends.

### **Conclusion**

It may be noted that all the solutions suggested in the novel are now possible and obsolete because of the Constitution of India has already declared untouchability to be a punishable crime. In fact the government of the day was introduced a system of special rights and privileges for the scheduled castes and backward classes which include the sweeper community. We see, from the above discussion, that Mulk Raj Anand was the novel to explore different points of view with regard to untouchability and expose the exploitation of the downtrodden in the name of religion.

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