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DELINEATION OF MARGINALIZED IN M R ANAND'S "UNTOUCHABLE"

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with how the marginalized people like untouchables, minorities, women, trans-genders are subjected to unspeakable suffering and exploitation from the time immemorial. Many novels have been written on this subject. The *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand is one of the most important amongst them. In this novel Anand depicts the humiliation and injustice meted out to the untouchables. The untouchables are socially segregated, economically exploited, religiously ignored and politically neglected for ages together. It also deals with women are economically and sexually exploited in the name of purity, pollution and religion. As the whites innovated ideas like Social Darwinism, Eugenics and Great Chain of Being, the caste Hindus innovated the concept of purity, pollution, varna system and later caste system in order to control, subjugate and exploit these people. The myriad incidents that are taking place every day against untouchables/Dalits, women, minorities, and trans-genders vindicate that the condition of these people has not changed for better. The condition of the untouchables can be compared to blacks in America. As race is everything in the west the caste is everything in India. One is born married and die in the same caste. There is no escape from the shackles of caste system in India. This anti-humanistic behavior towards the marginalized people is prevalent even today.

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'Animals, drums, illiterates, low castes, and women are worthy of being beaten' (*Manusmriti*, a book of Hindu religious scripture). No other religion in the world had explicitly divided people on the basis of caste, creed, sex, origin or purity and pollution in the world except Hinduism which is controlled and manipulated by the caste Hindus. In Hinduism, as it is mentioned in Rig Veda, the people are divided into four varnas which was later used by the caste Hindus to divide people into different castes to subjugate and exploit the people of lower social status. As Nicholas B Dirks makes a mention in his seminal work *Castes of Mind: Colonisation and the Making of Modern India*, the concept of caste system was the invention of Brahmins in the Vedic period for their own benefit in the name of purity and pollution. The untouchables are kept out of varna system and not considered human beings at all. That's why they were not given right to drink water from the public pond/well which an animal can do. It is also strongly believed in Hinduism that social status or caste is decided by god. There is no escape from this for the lower caste and marginalized people. They are born, married and die in

the same caste. As Dr. B R Ambedkar opines in his magnum opus '*Annihilation of Caste*', caste system is a state of mind. The best remedy to eradicate caste system is to abandon the sanctity of Shastras which segregates people in the name of caste. Caste system in India is like racism in rest of the world. In the west race is everything but in India caste is everything. Unless this evil system is rooted out, social, cultural, political equality and economic progress cannot be brought in the society. In the same way woman is considered weak and emotional and she lacks rationality. So many rights have not been given to her. She has to abide by rules and regulation made by patriarchy. In Hinduism if a man does not beget a male child he will not get salvation and heaven. The homosexuals or trans-genders are also considered evil forces and subjected to unspeakable humiliation and penury. So Hinduism is root cause of many social evils that are practiced by some people to exploit and humiliate the marginalized people like women, untouchables, adivasis, trans-genders/homosexuals, and minorities etc.

Indians are religiously very conscious and religion is an integral part of their life. They do not do anything that is against their religion. The notion of religion and fear of god is ingrained in the mind of people. The repeated insults and humiliations have made the marginalized people develop inferiority complex and look down upon themselves. The negative words of the binary opposites are associated with marginalized people and positive words of the same are associated with the caste Hindus. The untouchables, on the one hand, are called dirty, inferior, polluted, bad, unhygienic, evil, and uncivilized; on the other hand they are not allowed to wear proper clothes, not given education, and not allowed to live with other people. The condition of untouchables is worse off than the black slaves in America and Europe. The slaves are allowed to live in their master's house, prepare food for them and look after their children. The slaves can change their master or even become free and lead a respectable life, but the untouchables have no such chance. They are permanently excluded from the social intercourse and consolation of their religion. They are always polluters; wherever they go, whomever/whatever they touch it/he/she gets polluted. This inhuman treatment of untouchables is narrated in Anand's short story 'The Barber's Trade Union'. There is no one in India whose condition is worse than that of untouchables. The animals are better off than untouchables. The labor of untouchables is essential for the society but when it comes to recognition or identification, they are not considered at all; and identity is indispensable in a secular, multicultural and an egalitarian society.

The novel, *Untouchable*, begins with the description of the place where the marginalized people - the scavengers, water-carriers, barbers washer-men et al – made to live in outskirts of the village/city. They are forced to live in segregated area, since time immemorial, which is dirty, unhygienic and despicable. They are not allowed to live with the caste Hindus. The presence of these marginalized people amongst them pollutes them. This can be compared to social segregation of Afro-Americans in America where Afro-Americans are made to live in ghettos without basic amenities necessary for human beings. The British treated Bhaka like a human being during his sojourn in the barracks of British regiment. But the Indians treated him worse than animals. There are organizations which protest when animals are ill-treated, but when untouchables ill-treated, beaten and raped nobody comes to their rescue. This is a heinous crime committed against outcastes. The untouchables are abused in worst possible ways as if they do not have self-respect or as if they are not human beings at all. This has been happening since ages. There is no escape from caste system even in the 21 century.

The outcastes/untouchables are socially segregated from the mainstream society. The basic necessities are denied to the outcastes. They are not allowed to take water from the public wells and tanks. If they did the other caste people consider that water is polluted. Hence they had to wait at the foot of the well for the bounty of a caste Hindu to pour water into their pitchers. They have to wait for hours together in order to get water if any caste Hindu turn-up that way. The animals and birds have the right to drink water from public wells and tanks but for outcaste this basic human need has been denied in the name of purity and pollution. The condition of outcastes is worse than that of animals and birds.

Education is an agent of change and development for deprived and oppressed classes to enable them to improve their socio-economic, political and cultural condition. But the caste Hindus denied them this opportunity by barring them from attending schools. Even the presence of outcastes in school pollutes the

school and the children of upper castes. It is only an excuse for them to continue the subjugation of untouchables. The caste Hindus knew that education will improve their life and empower them to question age old rituals, rules and regulations which have been invented by Brahmins to socially segregate the outcastes. That is why outcastes are not allowed to read and interpret Vedas and Shastras. The Hindu Code Bill prepared by Dr B R Ambedkar was rejected for this reason only not because of his lack of merit/modernity. The notions of purity and pollution invented by Caste Hindus as the western white people invented notions like Social Darwinism, Eugenics, the Great Chain of Being in order to control and subjugate the black people. Again when Bakha goes to buy a pack of cigarette the shopkeeper throws some water to purify it and then throws a pack of cigarette as a butcher throws a bone to sniffing dog. The untouchables are treated like animals.

The very presence of outcastes pollutes and brings them unlucky. Hence they are never allowed to move freely in the mainstream society. Whenever they come out of their segregated area they have to announce their coming by shouting as Bakha does in the novel in order to warn other caste of their appearance. Then the caste Hindus can take deviation in order to avoid pollution by touch or presence. The Brahmin/priests sprinkled holy water before walking on the street in order to purify the path and to evade getting polluted if outcaste treaded on that path. If they happen to touch a caste Hindu even by mistake they were beaten hell out of them as it happens to Bakha. The people touch an animal like cow and think it is auspicious but the touch of a Dalit/outcaste pollutes them and it is considered bad omen. The outcaste people cannot talk back or question when they are even cheated. They cannot protest when a heinous crime like sexual molestation is committed against them as it happens in the case of Sohini. If they did they will be socially boycotted and denied basic facilities like food and water.

The untouchables are barred from entering the temple; even the proximity of them within particular distance from the temple pollutes it. A purificatory ceremony has to be conducted in order to purify the temple. It is written in great detail in Shastras how the purificatory ceremony has to be done. It is a very costly affair. The people belonging to particular caste can only become a priest not others; people belonging to a caste cannot enter the temple- if a religion/god discriminate people like this there must be something fundamentally wrong with that religion. This is the worst kind of social system that ever to exist on the earth. This notion of purity and pollution does not come they sexually exploit the untouchables; if they do not yield to their demand, they would be accused doing something wrong or they talk pollution, god and religion as it happens in the case of Sohini, Bakha's sister. A L Basham, a well-known historian points out in his famous book *The Wonder That Was India:Vol.1* how the Brahmins sexually exploited the women of lower castes in the name of god and religion. The exploitation of untouchables in all possible way is taking from pre-historic age to present day.

The outcaste women are doubly oppressed: on the one hand they are oppressed by patriarchy and on the other hand, by caste system. Woman has always been thought to be burden to the family. Even when something wrong like rape or molestation committed on her without any mistake from her side, she will be held responsible for it, not the wrong doer. The society behaves as if it is a curse to be born a woman as it happens to Sohini. Bakha reaction vindicates this point when the priest tries to sexually molest Sohini.

Economic exploitation is another issue that is highlighted in the novel. The outcastes are forced to work in the houses of caste Hindus; but they are not given remuneration for it. They can't demand anything. They have to beg for food as remuneration for their work. They are given left-over stale food of night, sometimes not even that. They were told to move on or come next day. Food was thrown at them as it is thrown to a dog or to an animal because if they touch outcastes by chance they will get defiled. If they do not go work the next day, they will be threatened of social boycott. This is happening to outcastes even today especially in rural India. They have to work for hours together for nothing. If they eat carcass of a dead cow or animal they are called dirty, cruel, and uncivilized, and eaters of holy cow which is greatest sin one can commit in one's life, what should they eat then?

Lakha's experience at the dispensary brings into focus another horrible effect of caste system. This incident reveals worth of life of untouchables. On the one they do not allow Lakha to inside; on the other hand they do not inform the doctor. It seems they do not mind even if the outcastes die. They are more worried

about their stupid notions of purity and pollution. The life of outcastes has no value in this country. Is there a religion in the world that prohibits people from helping the needy and showing mercy? If any religion does that it is not a religion at all.

The caste Hindus always thought that the outcastes are dangerous, evil, criminals and tend to cause problems for others. The same thing happened to black people in America. The black people targeted whenever there was a crime or any untoward incident took place. When Bakha takes the injured boy to his home, instead of thanking Bakha for the help the boy's mother abuses and accuses him of killing her son and defiling her home. The caste Hindus are always prejudiced in their opinion on untouchables and easily targeted them for any wrong doing.

As Michel de Montaigne, a philosopher of French Renaissance, says: 'We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things', it becomes indispensable to interpret interpretation of Gandhi on untouchability. Gandhi, a caste Hindu and a devotee Hinduism always spoke in favor of varna system which is the basis for the caste system, paid only a lip service to uplift untouchables and oppressed classes, who are subjugated to unspeakable suffering and humiliation from time immemorial. A reading of history of human kind shows that mere preaching does not result in the social, cultural political change. In the same way Gandhi's speeches and calling outcastes the children of God do not empower the untouchables to lead a happy and dignified life. It is like calling a woman Goddess and source of humankind does not remove gender bias and female foeticide which is rampant in Indian society even today; and adopting an untouchable or a baby girl is not going to solve the problem. Gandhi instead of taking some concrete legal steps to eradicate untouchability, he was telling them to change their food habit, belief system, dress code, life style etc. It is nothing but imposing Hindutva/Brahminical ideologies as universal values on the oppressed and exploited classes. It is gross violation of Indian's official policy of secularism, democracy, multiculturalism and cultural pluralism.

Gandhi practiced untouchability throughout his life. In his early years he practiced it due to reverence and regard for his mother and her great religion. While he was in England he enjoyed western way of life to full extent. As he returned to India he did not worry about practice of caste system and untouchability in his home, village, state and country. But when he was in South Africa he got enlightenment that racial discrimination is a heinous crime, anti-human only because he was at the receiving end. He did satyagraha and fought vociferously to eradicate racism. After his return to India from South Africa, he did not do any satyagraha or did not go on hunger strike till inhuman practices like caste system and untouchability are stopped, because he was in the advantages position. But he went on hunger strike till death when Dr. B R Ambedkar tried to politically empower outcastes through separate electorate. He travelled across the country and gave speeches on eradication of untouchability and the caste Hindus supported him because they knew mere speech or lip service does not change anything. But when it came to practice it he did not do it. When J Nehru was not willing to marry off his daughter, due to political and religious reasons, to a Parsi boy, an untouchable, for Nehru, a Kashmiri Brahmin, instead of convincing Nehru he adopted that Parsi boy to make Nehru, his political heir, happy. It becomes clear that Gandhi practiced untouchability all his life; and Gandhi is an agent of Brahmins and caste Hindus who conspired to control, enslave and subjugate outcastes and minorities forever. Gandhi had no principles; he had only ideologies which he imposed on others in the name of social reformation.

In the novel (P 74) M R Anand points out that it is the religion which prevents caste Hindus from touching outcastes. Hence to eradication untouchability and caste system it is must to abandon the sanctity of shastras as Ambedkar opines in his *Annihilation of Caste*. Once it is done we do not need Gandhi or anybody to change the people through their public speech. The people will change themselves. If we could not abandon religion the best way to escape from untouchability is conversion to another religion as it gives some respectability to the outcastes. But the present central government in India is trying very hard to pass anti-conversion legislation in order to continue the control and subjugation of the marginalized people.

The real savior of the marginalized people is none other than 'Mahan' Ambedkar. He enumerated specific areas of non-discrimination and required their violation to be made a cognizable offense and severely

punished. He pointed out that places like inns, educational institutions, roads, paths, streets, tanks, wells and other watering places, public conveyances on land, air or water, theatres and other places of public amusement, resort or convenience dedicated to public purposes should be available to all. Similarly individuals cannot be disqualified on the account of their religion, caste, creed, sex and social status; and subjecting a person forced labor or involuntary servitude should be made an offence. He also called for adequate representation of these castes in the legislature and executive. Social boycott and denial of basic facilities must be made an offence. In nutshell he fought against socio-economic, political and cultural discrimination meted out scheduled castes and tribes, women and minorities. Most of his suggestions have been adopted in the constitution after independence. Judiciary has followed Hindu Code Bill prepared by Ambedkar while giving judgements on cases concerning women and their position. Reservation for marginalized like SC, ST, adivasis, women and minorities for education as well as job opportunities.

The present condition of marginalized people is no different from the past in spite of a lot provisions to punish discrimination against them. They are subjected to unspeakable suffering and degradation. They are not allowed to public wells, tanks, and temples in the caste Hindu locality. The hands of a Dalit were chopped off as he dared to drink water from the vessel of caste Hindu in Haryana. The practice of manual scavenging is still prevalent across the country. The manual scavengers in Karnataka protested for disbursement of salary and other facilities by pouring human excreta on their head and body. Cultural oppression is a mundane thing. The Dalits were not allowed to mount horses as part of wedding procession. The Dalit boys were lynched if they dared to marry upper caste girls. A Dalit was murdered for a ringtone extolling Ambedkar and another was strangled to death for talking to a Maratha girl in Maharashtra. Honor killing is common when a Hindu girl married a Dalit boy. Dalits were urinated on the faces and forced to eat human excreta if they protest against discrimination. The police forced Dalits to drink urine when they complained about violence against them instead of taking action in Tamil Nadu. Ambedkar- Periyar study circle was derecognized in IIT, Madras for expressing its opinion on various social issues like Ghar Wapsi, Land Bill, Anti-conversion bill, ban on beef eating and using the name of Ambedkar in college campus. According to 1932 Poona Pact it is made mandatory to spend proportionate fund for socio-economic, cultural and political development of SCs and STs; but as the present government done away with Planning Commission it is hardly possible to allot money for development of SCs and STs. The name of Ambedkar has been used by almost all political parties to vote bank politics; a lot of money is spent to build his statues but there is not a single party which accepts his social, economic and political philosophy and implements them. As Ambedkar opines 'Hinduism is a political ideology of same character as Facist and Nazi ideology and it is thoroughly anti-democratic'.

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