
UNIT 7: MULK RAJ ANAND: UNTOUCHABLE AND RAJA RAO: KANTHAPURA

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7.0 INTRODUCTION

1930s was a period when the winds of change was blowing all over India. A social reformation was deeply felt by the people of India and at that critical juncture appeared Gandhi as a puff of fresh air with his visionary ideas to reform the stagnant Indian society especially the centuries old practice of untouchability. Just at that time a young man in his prime and driven by a strong desire to reform the Hindu society from its deep slumber writes book showing mirror to the upper caste Hindus of their own misdeeds of utter discrimination of the outcastes. Mulk Raj Anand wrote *Untouchables* when he was only thirty years of age. The narrative of a day's events in the life of Bakha was enough to shake the conscience of the discerning readers worldwide. Bakha, the protagonist, is an untouchable sweeper boy who goes on his daily task of cleaning toilets. He faces the humiliating experience of being hit by an upper caste man for touching him accidentally. He cannot retaliate, outcastes cannot. His sister Sohini's modesty was outraged by the hypocritical priest Pundit Kali Nath. He cannot do

anything, not even confront him. While begging food a woman throws bread at him and he had to accept that; severely scolded by the mother of a boy for touching him. To add on to his misfortunes he was driven out of home by an insensitive father. A frustrated and disgusted Bakha meets Colonel Hutchinson, the Padre who offers him an escape from this life of humiliation and degradation by coming into the fold *Yessuh Messih*, to convert to Christianity. Bakha escapes that trap too. He listens to the speech of Mahatma Gandhi who exhorts the untouchables to give up their bad habits and take the path of education. Bakha is inspired by hearing the speech of Mahatma Gandhi. However the intellectual discussion between a young poet and lawyer fills him with a sense of optimism. The young poet predicts that soon a machine would take up the job of the scavengers, flush latrines will eradicate the scourge of manual cleaning of toilets and untouchables will no more remain as untouchables after their profession changes.

Mulk Raj Anand makes scathing attack on the evil practice of untouchability. According to him the mistreatment the outcastes are subjected to makes them alienated. Anand is critical of religion being made a base to discriminate against the untouchables. He also exposes the hypocrisy of the upper caste Hindus who have deprived the outcastes and enjoy all the privileges for themselves. The writer ends the novel on a positive note by making Bakha hope for a future where there is hope that he would not have to remain as a sweeper for the rest of his life.

7.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This Unit deals with Mulk Raj Anand's first and most controversial novel *Untouchable* published in 1935. After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- Familiarize yourself with the life and literary career of Mulk Raj Anand
- Form an idea about the period in the backdrop of which this novel was written
- Understand the plot and action of the novel
- Acquaint yourself with the theme and characters of the novel
- Familiarize yourself with the narrative technique and style of the novel
- Understand Anand's art of characterization
- Form a critical opinion about the novel

7.3 MULK RAJ ANAND: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES/LITERARY CAREER

Biographical Sketches

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was born in Peshawar (now in Pakistan) on 12th December, 1905 into a family of coppersmiths with an army background. His parents are Lal Chand Anand (Father) and Ishwar Kaur (Mother) who hailed from a peasant's family in south central Punjab. His father rejected his ancestral occupation of coppersmith and took up the job of a clerk in the Dogra Regiment of British Indian Army. Mulk Raj Anand studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar and graduated from there with honours in 1924. He went to England and studied in the University College London as an undergraduate. During this period he worked in an Indian restaurant to financially support himself as his family was not rich enough to support him fully to pursue higher education in London. Later he moved to Cambridge University and graduated with a Ph. D. in 1929. His dissertation was on the thoughts of English Empiricists like John Locke, David Hume, George Berkeley and Bertrand Russell. During his stay in London he has established very close links with the famous intellectual club of London called the Bloomsbury Group.

Anand had married the English actress and Communist Kathleen Van Gelder in 1938 and had a daughter Susheilla. They divorced in 1948. Anand later married for the second time to Shirin Vajifdar, a Parsi classical dancer from Bombay, in 1950. He died of Pneumonia on 28th September 2004 at the ripe age of ninety-eight.

Literary Career

Although it may sound weird, Anand was initiated into a literary career as a result of a family tragedy. One of his aunts had to commit suicide because she was excommunicated for sharing a meal with a Muslim woman. Anand was profoundly affected by this tragedy caused by the rigid social system of India and caste and religious segregation. The first novel of Mulk Raj Anand *Untouchable* was published in 1935. This novel explores the impact of caste cruelty on the adolescent mind of an untouchable youth Bakha, a toilet cleaner. The novel narrates the humiliating experiences he is subjected to on a day in his life. This novel earned for Anand the sobriquet of 'Charles

Dickens of India'. The *Preface* to the novel was written by E.M. Forster whom he knew during his association with the literary magazine of T.S. Eliot *Criterion*.

In 1930s and 40s Anand actively participated in the Indian Freedom Struggle. He used to write on the cause of freedom of India while in London. While he was making a living as a novelist and journalist he was sympathetic to the Leftist Cause. He even travelled to Spain to participate in the Spanish Civil War. He was working as the script writer for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) in London and there he forged a friendship with George Orwell. In 1942 when Anand's novel *The Sword and the Sickle* got published Orwell wrote a review for it. Anand was also a friend of Pablo Picasso, the famous Spanish modernist painter. Anand returned to India in 1947 from London and fully devoted himself to writing. He wrote poetry, essays on a variety of subjects and also wrote autobiographies, novels and short stories. Some of the important works of Mulk Raj Anand are *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1939), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), *Coolie* (1936), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953). Anand was also instrumental in founding an art magazine called *Marg*. He also took up the profession of a teacher and taught in various universities. In 1970 he got associated with the International Progress Organization (IPO) and worked for cultural awareness among nations.

Mulk Raj Anand's literary career has been divided into three broad phases on the basis of his principal periods of residence in India and England that corresponds to his literary output. The first phase is his early years in India till his departure to England stretching from 1905 to 1925. The second period constitutes of the years abroad spanning from 1925 to 1945. The third period begins from the 1946 with his return to India till his death in 2004.

The first period, which stretches from 1905 to 1925, is a period of formation of his literary ideas. His father was a person who was reasonably secular and believed in coexistence with people of other religious beliefs. His mother too worshipped along with the idols of Hindu gods and goddesses, a cross, the picture of Aga Khan and Guru Nanak Dev. She used to read out chapters of *Bhagwat Gita* to Anand in his childhood. So Anand grew up as a person with a progressive and secular outlook to life. Anand

admits in “Why I Write” (*Indo-English Literature*, 1978) that his first essay was a letter to God in which he questions God on the death of his nine year old cousin Kaushalya who died of tuberculosis. Another significant event that left a lasting impression on the young mind of Anand was the suicide of his aunt Devaki as a result of her excommunication by a conservative Hindu society for sharing a meal with a Muslim woman. This incident actually prompted Anand to take up the path of protest through writing. In most of his novels he takes on the age old traditions of the society and attempts to tear them apart into smithereens through his powerful writing.

The second phase (1925-1945) of his literary career begins with his going to England for higher studies and continues till 1945. He takes admission in the University College London and enrolls for a doctorate degree in Philosophy under Professor G. Dawes Hicks. While in London Anand likes a girl Irene, the daughter of a Biology professor in the University of Wales. Irene finds in Anand a great conversationalist who narrates the stories of his aunts, mother, cousins with great skill. Irene encourages him to write them down as his life story. Being encouraged by her Anand writes almost two thousand pages what he calls *Confessions* modeled after Rousseau’s *Confessions*. Irene promises him that if this book gets published she would consider marrying him. However, the length of the manuscript becomes an insurmountable obstruction for its publication and in course of time the relationship between Anand and Irene too fades away. However, this manuscript becomes the basis of Anand’s future autobiographical novels like *Seven Summers* and *Morning Face*. Anand during his stay in London gets involved in many political activities. He gets beaten up once in London for supporting the coal mine workers strike. Despite his extra-academic involvements he completes his Ph. D. thesis on Bertrand Russell and the English Empiricists and is awarded the degree in the year 1929. After completing his Ph.D. he starts contributing articles to *Criterion* at the request of T. S. Eliot. He comes into contact with Anand Coomarswamy, pioneering historian and philosopher of Indian art, who encourages him to explore the latent glory of Indian Art. Being encouraged by Coomarswamy, Mulk Raj Anand writes the books *Hindu View of Art*, *Persian painting*, and *Golden Breath*, all get published in 1932. During this period he gets deeply influenced by the Gandhian doctrines especially by his vision of eradicating untouchability from Hindu society. The novel *Untouchable*

was published in 1935 as a result of his crusade against untouchability. The success of *Untouchable* inspires Anand to write more novels with social messages. The novels that followed *Untouchable* are – *Coolie* (1935), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Lal Singh Trilogy* (1942), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), and *The Big Heart* (1945). The decade from 1935 to 1945 becomes the most productive period in the literary career of Mulk Raj Anand.

The third phase of Anand's literary career begins from 1946 when he returns to India from England. He stays in Lahore for a year and then comes to Bombay and there he starts a literary magazine called *Marg*. In the year 1946 his next book *Apology for Heroism* is published. When he is engaged in the task of starting an art magazine *Marg* he comes into contact with a woman named Anil de Silva. He develops a soft corner for her and wants to marry her by divorcing his English actress wife Kathleen Van Gelder whom he has married in 1938. He goes to London and secures a divorce from Kathleen. But when he returns to India; to his utter dismay, finds that Anil has already been married a Frenchman deserting him. He goes into a bout of depression. Melpo, a Greek dancer, who nurses him in Bombay advises him to write down this experience of betrayal in love so that he can come out of his depression. The result was *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* published in 1953. Mulk Raj Anand has undertaken an autobiographical novel in seven volumes under the title *Seven Ages of Man* influenced by Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. However, he could complete only four volumes before his death in September, 2004. The first volume *Seven Summers* was completed in early 1951. It covers the first seven years of the author's life. The second volume *Morning Face* appeared in 1968. It covers only six years of the author's life and depicts the Jalianwalla Bagh Massacre of 1919. The third volume *Confessions of a Lover* appeared in 1976. It covers the life of the author from 1921 to 1924, his college years in Amritsar. This volume deals with the tragic love of Anand for a Muslim married woman Yasmin who was prepared to elope with him but was killed by her husband on the day of the planned elopement. The fourth volume *The Buble* was published in 1984. It covers the life of the author from 1925 to 1929 and also vividly describes the love of Anand for Irene in England.

Mulk Raj Anand has carved a niche for himself as a modern novelist in Indian Writing in English writing on a variety of subjects. Commenting on Anand's versatility critic K.R.S. Iyengar writes:

As a writer of fiction, Anand's notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality. He is a veritable Dickens for describing the inequities and idiosyncrasies in the current human situation with candour as well as accuracy. (*Indian Writing in English*, P-356)

Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao are the three pillars of Indian English novel. Out of these three Mulk Raj Anand is the most prolific. He has about 70 short stories to his credit, 14 novels and thousands of letters in which he makes telling comments on his art and craft. He was awarded the Padma Bhusan in 1968 for his contribution to Indian English Writing. He was also conferred with the prestigious Sahitya Akademy Award in 1971 for his autobiographical novel *Morning Face*. In 1953 he was given the International Peace Prize for World Peace. He breathed his last on 28th September 2004 in Pune leaving behind his wife and a daughter.

Check Your Progress-I

1. What initiated Anand into a literary career?
2. Discuss in brief the periods of literary career of Mulk Raj Anand. (100 words)
3. What awards were conferred on Anand for his literary contributions?

2.3 About the novel

Caste system among the Hindus is a rigid hierarchy based on *Karma*. *Manusmriti* or *Manu Samhita* is widely regarded as the most authoritative book of Hindu laws and dates back to almost 2000 years. Caste system divides Hindus into four broad categories *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras*. The *Shudras* are engaged in cleaning toilets, cleaning drains and such other lowly jobs what the other sections of the society do not do. At the top of the caste column are the *Brahmins* who are believed to have come from Brahma's mouth and hence engaged in giving knowledge to the society. The second is the *Kshatriyas*, the warriors and the ruling class, believed to have come from the arms of Brahma. The third is *Vaishyas*, or the trading class who are supposed to have

come from the thighs of Brahma. The fourth is the *Shudras* who came from the feet of the Brahma and are engaged in menial jobs. This system bestowed undue privileges on the upper caste while repressing the low caste people in a very regressive manner. This system of caste continued unopposed for centuries in the Hindu society suppressing the outcastes, discriminating them and subjecting them to inhuman humiliations.

The decade of 1930 was the foundational period of a modern independent India. Many political events bear testimony to this: Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha Movement of 1930 and 1932, the three Round Table Conferences, the passing of the Government of India Act in 1935, the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, the Gandhian Movement of Harijan Uplift and Basic Education, and many such epoch making political events propelled India on the path of modernization. Traditional beliefs and adherences to blind ritualistic religion were questioned. Most pronounced among all the past practices was the caste system and the treatment of the outcastes by the upper caste Hindus. Many modern progressive political leaders now started to question and severely scrutinize this inhuman practice and were quite outspoken against it.

During this period Gandhi emerged as the unchallenged leader of the Indian masses. He was regarded not only as a political leader but also as a social reformer. The people of India looked forward to him to bring about progressive changes in to the stagnant Indian society. One of the notable things of emergence of Gandhi as a leader of the masses is that he inspired the youth of India to work for a better and more liberal society. Many reform movements initiated during the mid 19th century in India like the Brahmo Samaj (founded by Raja Rammohun Roy) and Arya Samaj (founded by Dayanand Saraswati) and these organizations strived to bring about social equality and fought for the rights of the untouchables who were totally marginalized by the upper caste Hindus. Congress under Gandhi incessantly worked for the uplift of the untouchables. The Indian novelists writing in English were deeply influenced by the major political happenings, social upheaval, and ideological churnings of the time. M. K. Naik in his chronicle of Indian writing in English terms this age as the age of "Gandhian Whirlwind". (*History of Indian English Literature*)

During the Freedom Struggle Mahatma Gandhi whole heartedly strived to bring about a unity among the different religious and caste groups of Indians. He found that the Hindu society is fragmented because of the discriminatory practice of caste system where the low caste people are treated in most inhuman way denying them the basic rights of existence with dignity. He decided to eradicate this oppressive system and give the untouchables a life of dignity. Gandhi undertook the famous fast unto death in 1932 against the establishment of a separate electorate for the untouchables. Gandhi's genuine efforts brought in an element of awakening among the Indians against this brutal caste system.

When Mulk Raj Anand began his literary career as a novelist, he was very much in the thick of the political events that were beginning to change the Indian culture and society. He became very critical of the blind adherence to past traditions like caste system, its obscurantism and fossilization. Anand attempted to spread the vision of a society based on equality, mutual respect for each other and humanitarian compassion. Anand prepared the manuscript of this novel while he was in England in 1930. He came to India in 1932 and stayed in Sabarmati Ashram and showed the manuscript to Gandhi and carried out modifications on his advice and took the manuscript to publishers. Anand has mentioned that nineteen publishers turned it down. He was so depressed at these rejections of his manuscript that he seriously contemplated suicide. When E. M. Forster read the manuscript and wrote an introduction, it finally got published.

Mulk Raj Anand is the first novelist in Indian English to take up the subject of a low class sweeper. He keeps close to the ground reality and uses little imagination. He does not hesitate to throw light on one of the darkest spots of Hinduism and Indian way of life.

In *Untouchable* Mulk Raj Anand tells the poignant story of man's cruelty to another fellow human being. His story centres around the evils of caste system in Hinduism. The story of *Untouchable* is based on Anand's childhood memory of a low caste sweeper and his primary concern is the relation between the individual and the society. After the publication of *Untouchable* it was hailed as one of the most gripping yet controversial novels of the era. In no uncertain terms Anand unequivocally condemns

the hypocritical practice of untouchability and takes to task the upper caste Hindus for perpetuating such a system where one human being treats another so cruelly.

Check Your Progress-II

1. Present a brief note on the caste system as prescribed in ancient Indian scriptures. (100 words)
2. Discuss the political and social condition of India during the decade of 1930s.
3. Briefly narrate the story behind the publication of the novel *Untouchable*.

Stop to Consider

Manu Samhita

Out of the many *Dharmashastras* of Hinduism *Manu Samhita* is an ancient work in Sanskrit composed by Manu in about 2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE. Some Oriental scholars hold the view that this law book might be in existence as early as 500 BCE. *Manu-Smriti* or *Laws of Manu* is considered one of the oldest in its genre. In *Mahabharata* it is described that Manu is the first King who was endowed with great wisdom. And in Manu's race have been born all human beings, hence called *Manavas*. *Manu Samhita* has 2,694 stanzas in 12 chapters. The story regarding its origin tells that ten great sages approached Manu and asked to declare to them the sacred laws of caste. Manu acceded to their request. He assigned this task of explaining to his disciple and student Bhrigu. The laws were originally taught to Manu by Brahma, the Creator according to Hinduism. Thus the laws are of divine origin and Manu has simply laid them down in writing. However, this Brahminical belief that *Manu Smriti* is divine in origin is not shared by Oriental scholars of the western world. It deals with interesting cosmogony, definitions of what is right and fit (dharma), the sacraments, initiation and Vedic study, forms of marriage, hospitality and funerary rites, dietary laws, pollution and purification. *Manu Samhita* prescribes a four class (*varna*) society. *Manu Samhita* similarly lays down rules regarding the position women in the society and opposes any type of freedom to them. In Verses IX to XVIII, it even discourages women from reading Holy Scriptures. Some of the codes of conduct are related to the caste system and discuss the stages of life. *Manu Samhita*

greatly exaggerates the position and utility of the *Brahmin* caste to the society and places the *Shudras* in despicable position only to be despised and exploited as outcastes. But the codes of law prescribed in *Manu Samhita* were not laws rather were norms associated with social obligations and ritual requirements. *Manu Samhita* is one of the most heavily criticized of the scriptures of Hinduism for its controversial prescriptions for the society. How controversial the recommendations of *Manu Samhita* can be assessed from the following lines:

- *Brahmanas* are assigned the task of studying and teaching since they sprang from the mouth of Brahma.
- *Kshatriyas* are assigned the duty of protecting the people. They are created from the arms of Brahma.
- The *Vaishyas* are to carry out trade and commerce and they are created from the thighs of Brahma.
- The *Shudras* are to serve meekly the three castes above them since they are created from the feet of Brahma.

(Bühler, George tr: *The Laws of Manu*. Banarsidass (Reprint from Oxford University's 1886-edition). Delhi, 1984.)

2. 4 Preface to *Untouchable* by E. M. Forster

Forster in the preface to *Untouchable* admits that a book like this could only have been written by an Indian because the subject matter is so that no westerner could have delved deep into it to portray the problem as realistically as Mr. Mulk Raj Anand did. Forster considers the *Untouchable* a clean book although it deals with the topic of toilet cleaning and the life of toilet cleaners in the context of the Indian Hindu society.

No European writer could have ever taken up such a restricted topic as the subject matter of a novel, asserts Forster. Anand could take up such a challenging topic to deal with in his first novel because he looked at the subject matter as a detached outsider. According to Forster, Mulk Raj Anand could do it because being a *Kshatriya* (upper caste Hindu) himself he looked at the problem of the inhuman oppression of the Untouchables from outside. Even a writer belonging to the untouchable community or

a European could not have written a novel like *Untouchable* because the former would have been too much involved with the subject and the latter could not have perceived the real everyday troubles of an untouchable, adds Forster. Forster further reiterates that Mulk Raj Anand could take up such a subject to deal with in his first novel because he has come to the world of fiction through his studies in philosophy that has given him a profound depth of understanding. Forster admires Anand for keeping the narration of the book surprisingly clean despite the fact that he dealt with the usually despised subject of human body relieving itself. Many societies, even in the West, teach their children to think of human excretion as a shameful act and have physically and psychologically considered it as evil. However, Forster acknowledges that the Indians are quite frank about this daily ritual of purgation as necessary as any other natural activities of the body like sleeping.

Forster expresses his shock at the condition of the Indian toilet cleaners by saying that their condition is even worse than that of an American black slave. The segregation suffered by the Indian toilet cleaners is much more worse than the social segregation suffered by the blacks in the United States of America as the untouchable in India is excluded from all types of social interaction and also the emotional shelter of religion. An Untouchable in India is not allowed to enter any Hindu temple nor is he regarded as a member of the religious fold; he lives and dies a life of a social outcaste. He has to announce his presence so as to warn the orthodox higher class Hindus to take precautions to avoid touching him.

The portrayal of the character of Bakha is life-like and perfectly realistic, feels Forster. Commenting on the structure of the novel Forster says that the novel is simply planned and has a form. One day in the life of untouchable Bakha in the small town of Bulashah forms the narrative of the novel. The first incident of Bakha accidentally 'touching' a higher caste Hindu in the market brings in the theme of social discrimination and oppression of the lower castes in Indian society. The novel offers three solutions to this human problem of oppression of a section of the downtrodden--- first solution is that of Hutchinson, the Salvationist missionary who proposes to Bakha to convert to Christianity, a religion which considers every human being as equal regardless of caste

and race. The second solution is Gandhi, who declares that every Indian is equal irrespective of caste, language and religion. The third solution, a more convincing one, is the introduction of flush system latrines which would automatically eradicate manual scavenging. Bakha, at the end of the day, returns to his home torn between the Mahatma and the Machine and hoping that a change is at hand.

Check Your Progress-III

1. Summarize E.M. Forster's 'Preface' to *Untouchables*. (100 words)

2. 5 *Untouchable* synopsis

2.5.1 Bakha, the Sweeper, starts his day

Untouchable is the story of Bakha, an eighteen year old low-caste Hindu whose hereditary occupation has been to clean the latrines of the high caste people and sweep the streets in the fictional town of Bulashah. He is the son of Lakha, who is gradually retiring from the occupation and handing over his responsibility to Bakha. Bakha's brother Rakha and his grown up and beautiful sister, Sohini are the other members of his family. Bakha's mother has been dead long ago. The novel is a day's story in the life of Bakha.

Like everyday else Bakha is woken up by the shouts of cuss words of his father to go to his daily task of cleaning latrines. Lakha, his father, has of late developed a sense of inertia and gradually handing over the tasks to his son that once used to be his duty. Bakha wakes up because Charat Singh, a famous hockey player and a Havildar with the 38 Dogra regiment of British Indian Army, too shouts at him to clean his toilet so that he can use it. Charat Singh also promises Bakha to give him a hockey stick if he meets him (Charat Singh) in the evening. Bakha starts his day by going about his daily business of cleaning latrines. As usual he finishes his duty soon and returns home tired and thirsty.

Like everyday he wants his breakfast and a cup of hot tea badly. But today he finds that there is no water in the house. His sister Sohini goes out with an earthen pitcher to collect

water from the well of the locality. But being an untouchable the social customs do not allow her to draw water from the community well like the upper caste Hindus. Her heart sinks when she sees a long queue of untouchable women already waiting much before her for some upper caste man to pass by who can draw water for them. Among the waiting low caste women there was Gulaboo, the washerwoman and mother of one of Bakha's friend Ram Charan. She is a very quarrelsome woman. She provokes Sohini for a quarrel but Sohini remains calm and composed while waiting for a high caste man to draw water for them. Finally they find Pundit Kali Nath, a priest of the local temple, who is passing by and make a collective request to him to draw water for them. He accepts their request to draw water for them. He accepts their request neither for his love nor he is sympathetic to these untouchables but because he is suffering from chronic constipation and he believes that some sort of physical activity like drawing water from the well would help in moving his bowel. By nature he is a very lecherous person and while drawing water he casts a lusty glance at Sohini. To realize his lustful desire he wants Sohini to come to the temple so that he can make amorous advances. He tells Sohini to come to the temple to sweep the temple courtyard. Sohini cannot disobey the orders of a Brahmin priest and complies to go to the temple and sweep the courtyard. Pundit Kali Nath, in return, gives her water first although other women were waiting much before her. Sohini returns home with a pitcher of water and serves tea to her brother. After having tea and breakfast Bakha goes out with a broom and a basket to sweep the street which is originally the task of his father but today his father has feigned illness and the responsibility of the job falls on Bakha.

Bakha has always been enamoured by the British soldiers (Tommies) whom he always observes in their camps nearby his home in the untouchables colony. Many a times he too has wanted to be an educated man, and a *sahib*. But for a low caste sweeper going to school and getting educated is not that easy. First, the parents of high caste Hindus will not agree to send their children to a school to study along with a low caste boy, secondly, the teacher will not pollute himself by teaching to an untouchable student. But Bakha has a great passion for education. He meets a 5th class student of a school, son of a *Babu*, and strikes a deal with him that he would pay him an *anna* (equal to six paise, a unit of Indian money at that time) for every lesson he teaches him. After settling the

matter of his education with the boy he happily goes to the town. The town looked attractive and colourful to him as he has come to the town after almost a month to sweep the streets. He looks at the variety of shops selling different wares like clothes, grocery, vegetables, sweetmeat, photos etc. He looks at the signboards of doctors, lawyers, shops and wished he could read them at the same time he consoles himself remembering that he has made a deal with the school boy to teach him. He buys a packet of cigarettes from a pan shop. The shopkeeper accepts money from him only after sprinkling water on it. Bakha realizes that he has not bought the matches. He requests a Muslim man smoking his *hookah* to light his cigarette. He allows him to light his cigarette. Bakhha smokes feeling like a confident man and moves in the market. His eyes get struck with the sweetmeat stall displaying mouth watering items. He buys *jalebis*, the cheapest of sweets paying four *annas*, after a lot of deliberation with himself as he has only eight *annas* on him. Bakha placed the coins on the shoe board of the shop and the assistant of the shop sprinkles water on the coins before taking them. Eating from the packet of *jalebis* Bakha strolls in the street looking around the shops and signboards when he accidentally bumps into a high caste Hindu man. The man shouts at him accusing him of not announcing his customary call to warn other people that an untouchable is coming.

You swine, you dog, why didn't you shout and warn me of your approach? ... Don't you know, you brute, that you must not touch me! (P-38)

A scene is created by the high caste man and he accuses Bakha of polluting him by touching and now he has to take bath again to purify himself totally upsetting his daily routine. A crowd gathers and sneers at Bakha holding him responsible for the ordeal of the high caste Hindu man. A shocked Bakha stands there with jaws dropped and hands folded in humility admitting his mistake. Notwithstanding Bakha's acquiescence the high caste man slaps Bakha in the market before the gathering of a crowd. His packet of *jalebis* fall scattered on the ground. The matter would have further worsened had Bakha not been saved by a Muslim *tongawala* from that humiliating situation.

Distressed Bakha, after the incident at the market comes to the temple to clean the temple courtyard. He wonders at the huge statues of the gods and goddesses on the

temple gate and the walls and out of great curiosity peeks into the temple climbing a few steps to see the temple services that is going on inside. Suddenly he hears a commotion of somebody shouting “polluted, polluted”. It was the priest Pundit Kali Nath who comes out of the temple running followed by Sohini in a distraught state. For a moment Bakha thinks that it is his going so near the statues has polluted the temple. But later he gets a clear picture of what exactly has happened. In fact it is the priest Pundit Kali Nath who has attempted to outrage the modesty of his sister Sohini in the temple premises when she shouts and protests to escape the priest’s sexual assault, Pundit Kali Nath makes a noise that he has been polluted by the touch of the untouchable girl. When Bakha hears this from his sister he angrily returns to confront the crowd and the priest as well. Sohini dissuades him from doing any such thing because it would be too embarrassing for her. He sends her sister home.

After the unpleasant incident of attempted sexual assault on Sohini Bakha sends her home and the day’s task of begging for food from the houses in the alley now falls on Bakha. He wanders in the silversmith’s alley asking for food, customary for a low caste sweeper to beg for food everyday from the houses he cleans. He loudly asks for food “Bread for the sweeper, mother, bread for the sweeper”, (P-59) moving from door to door but gets no response from any of the houses. He is exhausted and terribly tired and so sits in front of a house and soon dozes off. In his sleep he dreams of weird and disparate things. He sees he is being driven in a bullock cart in the midst of a most marvelous city; he encounters a wedding procession of brightly dressed happy people, a Sikh band dressed in the uniform of the English Army, he sees himself standing on a railway platform where forty freight wagon stood with engines on both ends, he sees two trucks loaded with boulders and he is sitting in one of them wearing a solar topee, he hears a lot of noise and sees that the some coolies are pushing a coach into the shed, he sees many such incoherent things in his dream till he gets woken up by the invocations of an acetic. Hearing the invocation “*Alakh, Alakh*” of the Sadhu a housewife comes out with a plateful of food and she does not expect to find the untouchable Bakha sitting on her doorstep. She is irritated and angry at the presence of an untouchable and scolds Bakha for defiling her house. Bakha admits his guilt but also informs the woman of the purpose of his coming that is, asking for bread. The woman

wants to extract some work from Bakha before giving him bread. So she tells Bakha to clean the drain and when Bakha starts cleaning the drain with a broom the woman makes her child relieve in the drain itself. Bakha is filled with a sense of revulsion; the woman throws a piece of bread at Bakha from the upstairs of her house. Bakha feels greatly disgusted at this humiliating behaviour of the housewife and leaves the place.

Check Your Progress-IV

1. Narrate the incident in which Bakha is slapped by an upper caste Hindu. (60 words)
2. Comment on the sexual assault on Sohini by Pundit Kali Nath.
3. Describe the mistreatment meted out to Bakha by the woman in the silversmith's alley.

2.5.2 Bakha returns home after his morning shift duty

A distraught Bakha returns home after the humiliating experiences he suffers at the hands of the high caste people. He broods over the events that have happened with him in the morning—the slap of the high caste man in front of a crowd in the market; the expletives people in the crowd used for him; the sexual assault on his sister by Pundit Kali Nath and his helplessness in the matter to give justice to his sister and the humiliating behavior the woman in the lane subjected him to plays constantly in his mind making him sad and very disturbed. He reflects upon his miserable life and a terrible sense of self-pity envelopes him. At home Lakha, his father, was hungry and is waiting for food, Rakha, his brother, has gone on collecting food from the houses and Sohini, his sister, after the traumatic experience at the temple has returned home. Bakha is now in a dilemma as to how to disclose these happenings of the morning to his father because he knows that for all this his father would blame him not the others. So he decides that it is better not to tell anything to his father. But from his behavior Lakha comes to know that something has gone wrong with his son. When Lakha asks him about his angry mood Bakha explodes, the suppressed anger and grief gushes out. He tells everything about all those humiliating things that have happened to him and his

sister in the morning. After listening to Bakha, his father tells him that all the high caste people are not as bad as he thinks them to be, there are many good high caste people too. He tells Bakha a story of a high caste *Hakim* (a country doctor) Bhagwan Das who had saved him (Bakha) when he was seriously ill as a child. The father advises Bakha that he has to work and live in this place in future and there is no point feeling insulted and having a grudge towards the high caste people. Bakha is moved by the story of the high caste *Hakim* but when he visualizes his future in the present situation his heart sinks further thinking about the miserable state of condition lying ahead of him for the rest of his life. Bakha feels suffocated and leaves the home telling that he is going to the marriage ceremony of Ram Charan's (his Washerman friend) sister. The moment he thinks of Ram Charan's sister his childhood memories crowd his mind. He recollects the days when as children they were playing marriage and Ram Charan's sister used to be his wife.

Bakha goes out of his suffocating home and meets his two intimate friends Ram Charan, the washerman's son and Chota, the cobbler boy. It is the day of Ram Charan's sister's marriage and he has secretly collected a few *ludus* (sugar plums) from his home. All three escape to a secluded place in the Bulashah Hills. Chota notices the melancholic mood of Bakha and asks him the reason behind it. Bakha narrates his experiences of humiliation that have happened with him in the morning; the slapping of the man in the market for just accidentally touching him, the sexual assault on his sister by Pundit Kali Nath and the throwing of the bread at him by the woman in the silversmith alley. Chota listens to Bakha's story of humiliation and feels sympathetic and plans to take revenge against the Pundit. Ram Charan cannot stay for long as he may be required in the ongoing marriage ceremony of his sister so they decide to depart.

Soon after his friends depart Bakha is left alone he feels a terrible sense of loneliness. He broods over his present state and desperately wants to escape from this miserable life but a growing feeling of pessimism envelopes him that he cannot get away from this wretched life of an untouchable. He reaches the barracks of English soldiers. It was empty and he sees a hat (solar topee) hanging on the wall. The hat is not an ordinary one; many legends are associated with it. Some say that the hat is a symbol of authority

of the British. Others say that this hat remains here because it has been forgotten by a *Sahib* who never returned to reclaim it and thus it remains hanging here. There is also a widespread rumour that once a *sahib* was court martialled for shooting a sepoy. Since a *sahib* cannot be put behind bars in the lock up for the crime his hat and belt was kept in the lock up symbolically. The British officer was being helped by his superior to escape the punishment and since then his hat hangs on the wall. Bakha gets quite attracted to the solar hat hanging from a peg on the verandah of the 38 Dogra's quarterguard. At one point he thinks of stealing it but desists thinking of the consequences. It is the afternoon and the whole barrack is silent and nobody is outside perhaps the soldiers are resting. Bakha remembers the promise of Havildar Charat Singh who has promised to give him a hockey stick. He waits in front of the Havildar's room for quite some time and finally Havildar Charat Singh does come out and sees Bakha waiting for him. Surprisingly for Bakha Charat Singh behaves in a very cordial manner with him and most of all tells him to bring a piece of burning charcoal from the kitchen. For Bakha it is something very surprising where others do not even touch him thinking that they will be polluted, Charat Singh, on the contrary, sends him to the kitchen the most sacred part of a Hindu household. Bakha happily goes to the kitchen and brings a piece of charcoal for the hubble bubble (hookah). Charat Singh offers him tea and also quite generously gives him a brand new hockey stick. Bakha is greatly elated receiving the hockey stick, his happiness at getting the hockey stick knows no bounds and the Havildar's kindness moves Bakha deeply. After getting the hockey stick Bakha gets so excited that he searches for his friends to play. What is the use of the stick without a game of hockey, he thinks. His friends Chota, Ram Charan and others gather and soon an unplanned hockey match between the 31st Punjab and 38 Dogras regiment starts. In the match Bakha playing for the 38 Dogras scores a goal which the opposition claims as a foul and a brawl between the opposing players begins which leads to stone pelting. On the boundary lines of the ground the younger brother of a player was sitting and was hit with a stone on the head thrown by Ram Charan. The boy starts to bleed profusely and falls unconscious. Bakha lifts the boy in his arms and takes him to his home. The boy's mother comes out and sees that an untouchable sweeper is carrying her injured son. She screams at Bakha for defiling her child by touching him and accuses him of killing her

son. The boy's elder brother tries to convince his mother that it is not the fault of Bakha and he just wanted to help but mother of the child remains unconvinced and continues to rebuke Bakha severely. A dejected Bakha leaves the place with sense of deep hurt. He laments his misfortune that the happiness Havildar Charat Singh has given him by treating him well and gifting him a new hockey stick lasted only for half an hour.

“Unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?” (P-110)

Check Your Progress-V

1. Discuss Bakha's friendship with Ram Charan and Chota. (60 words)
2. Comment on Charat Singh's treatment of Bakha.

2.5.3. Bakha expelled from his home

After the bitter experience in the hockey match Bakha returns home in the afternoon. Back at home his father is furious because leaving behind his afternoon task of cleaning the latrines he was playing outside. His brother Rakha is now preparing with the broom and basket to go on his behalf. When his father Lakha sees him he shouts at him using select expletives like “Son of a pig! Son of a dog!” (P-108) and accuses him of being apathetic to the old father. When father rains abuses on him Bakha keeps his cool and slowly moves to collect the basket and the broom and escape his father's wrath by going on his daily task. He finds that his brother Rakha is standing with the basket and the broom and is about to leave on the task of cleaning latrines. The father shouts at him again not to touch the broom and leave the house immediately never to return. Bakha has faced this type of wrath and even occasional beating of his father before too but toady it is beyond his level of tolerance. He leaves his home.

He wanders on the river side aimlessly thinking that can it be the same father who had once begged for his life at the *Hakim's* when he was a child? He is brooding over the undeserved humiliation he has so far been subjected to he notices that a man is walking up to him. He is Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of local Salvationist Army, a Padre who preaches Christianity and converts low caste Hindus into Christianity. He is dressed like a native Indian so that he can mix well with the untouchables and convert them to Christianity. He comes to Bakha in order to persuade him to convert. When he comes

and talks to Bakha, he (Bakha) becomes surprised that a *sahib* is not only taking notice but also talking so sweetly to him. He feels greatly elated with a sense of gratitude. Then he broaches the subject of *Yessuh Massih* (Jesus Christ). He says to Bakha come to *Yessuh Messih* and he will save him from his sins. He talks a lot with Bakha about Christianity and now and then would sing a hymn from the *Bible* which made Bakha confused. Bakha got further confused by terms like ‘sinner’, ‘saviour’ and ‘Son of God’, ‘forgiven’, ‘sacrifice’. What puzzled Bakha the most about Christianity is that how can a human being be the son of God? Why does the Colonel tell him that he is a sinner when he has not done anything wrong? Why did Jesus die for humanity so on and so forth? He accompanies Colonel Hutchinson to the church of Bulashah. At the gate of the church Hutchinson’s wife Mary Hutchinson shouts at him “Oh, is that what you have been doing, going to these blackies again!” (122). The angry words of the *mem-sahib* seemed more terrible to Bakha than the abuse of the man who had slapped him in the market that morning. Apprehending more trouble Bakha extricates himself from the situation and flees from the place when Colonel Hutchinson was reciting “Blessed by Thy love, blessed be Thy name” (123).

A depressed Bakha listlessly moves towards the railway station in the midst of nauseating scenes of beggars and lepers. When he reaches the railway station he hears two roars of sound, one is the sound of a train stopping at the platform and the other is a chorus of “*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*”. Bakha comes to know that Mahatma Gandhi is coming to Bulashah for a public meeting after he has been released from the jail. Bakha joins the crowd waiting for Gandhi and hears their conversation. When a rustic fellow asks “Will he really overthrow the government?” (129) a *Babu* replies that Gandhi has the *Shakti* to defeat the mighty British because of the *dharmic* discipline that he follows. The *Babu* talked of how Gandhiji wants to empower the people of the village through *Panchayats* and advises the villagers not to go the government courts rather settle their cases in the *Panchayats* itself. Bakha does not understand anything of this discussion but he becomes interested when he hears that Gandhi is going to speak on the uplift of the *Harijans*, the untouchables and he eagerly waits for Gandhi. Bakha hears that Gandhi has been restricted by the British government not to speak on any political topic in his public meetings as a condition of his release from the jail. Thus, he can only speak

on the *Harijans*, the God's Men, as Gandhi called the untouchables. The whole atmosphere echoed with the slogan of "*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai, Hindu-Mussulman-Sikh ki jai, Harijan Ki jai.*" Gandhiji gets off a motor car and heads towards the stage. Huge gathering of the masses rush towards Gandhi to have a better view of him. Bakha too wants to rush along the crowd to see Gandhi from close but desists because if he touches somebody of the high caste, even accidentally, there will be a scene and Gandhiji would be too far away to save him. Bakha searches for a vantage point from where he could get a better sight of Gandhi. He finds a tree and climbs on it and sits on a branch high up. The meeting is about to start. Gandhi begins a silent prayer and stillness reigns on the crowd. In this stillness Bakha forgets all the bitter experiences he has gone through in the day—the slap of the high caste man in the market that morning; Pundit Kali Nath's sexual assault on his sister Sohini; the humiliation he has suffered at the hands of the woman in the silversmith's alley; the mistreatment he has received from the mother of the injured boy; the walk on the hills with his friends Chota and Ram Charan; his expulsion from home by his father; Colonel Hutchinson's attempt to convert him to Christianity and his angry and shouting wife; he forgets everything and concentrates on Gandhi's speech. Finally Gandhi begins to speak. He begins by saying:

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity. 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. (136)

The beginning part of Gandhi's speech is beyond the comprehension of Bakha. Gandhi continued saying that he considers untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. He narrates a story of his childhood experience with an untouchable boy Uka. He used to touch the untouchable boy without any inhibition despite the fact that it was socially unacceptable. He also used to argue with his mother that there is nothing wrong in touching a low caste man. His mother advised him that the shortest way to purification after touching a low caste is to touch a Mussalman. So Gandhi out of respect for his mother used to touch untouchables and then touch a Muslim. However he never did it

out any religious belief but respect for his mother. Bakha's interest increased in the speech of Gandhi when he spoke of his childhood experience with an untouchable boy. He starts to identify himself with Gandhi's childhood untouchable friend Uka. Gandhi continues that God is the purifier of the polluted soul and to consider anyone born in India as polluted and unclean is a great sin. Listening to the story of Gandhi's attitude towards the untouchable Bakha feels that this man has real sympathy for the untouchables. Gandhi further says that the untouchables are not just cleaning the latrines they are cleaning the Hindu society. If he ever gets another birth he would pray to be born as a scavenger. If any Hindu oppresses them then it should be understood that the fault lies with the person who oppresses the *Harijans* not with the Hindu religion. Gandhi continuing his advice says that *Harijans* should only accept whole good quality grain from the high caste people. Each and every word uttered by Gandhi pierces through the soul of Bakha. At one point of the speech Bakha feels like shouting at Gandhi from amidst the crowd that look Sir here is an untouchable who was beaten up by a high caste man just for touching him accidentally, he was humiliated by a woman for being an untouchable. Gandhi in his speech also advised the outcaste community to remain clean and give up bad habits. Then Gandhi says that no *harijan* should accept leftover food of any caste Hindu. Bakha feels like shouting back at Gandhi that today morning a woman threw leftover bread at him.

After the meeting of Gandhi the crowd gradually dispersed. Two gentlemen Iqbal Nath Sarshar, the young poet and the Editor of *Nawan Jug* (New Era) and the other R. N. Bashir, western educated Barrister at Law, start a debate on Gandhi's speech. R. N. Bashir rubbishes the speech of Gandhi saying that it is full of contradictions. On one hand Gandhi says of eradicating untouchability and on the other asserts his being an orthodox Hindu. In twentieth century he urges people to go back to spinning wheel when the western world has been rapidly getting industrialized. The young poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar counters that it is unfair to abuse Gandhi as he is the greatest liberating force of this age. He may have limitations but fundamentally his vision is sound. The young poet continues, India was a rich country with abundance of natural resources but preferred to remain an agricultural country. That is where India shunned machines but a time will come when India will have to adopt machines in order to progress. The westernized

gentleman says one who considers this world as a *maya* (illusion) will not accept the machine. The poet asserts that in future machines will have to be accepted to create a casteless society because it is the profession of a person which classifies his caste. But when machine will be introduced castes will not be based on profession and hence it will automatically vanish. Asserting the role of machines in changing the traditional professions he says:

When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without any one having to handle it-- the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (146)

Driving home his point on the caste system in the Hindu society the poet argues that in the *Upanishads* it is said that man is born and reborn till he is released from the bondage of birth. The poet explains that the wily Brahmins have associated the birth of a person in high or low caste to the philosophy of *Karma*. Those who are born in high caste are enjoying the fruits of their good *Karma* of their previous birth and the people who are born in lower caste are suffering the bad *Karma* of their earlier birth. This is misinterpretation of the *Karma* philosophy. Europeans have misunderstood the word *maya* as illusion but the real meaning of *maya* is not illusion but magic. The poet asserts that the Mahatma is more convincing in his views on untouchability than in his political and economic views. This inequality can be destroyed only by democracy. A congressman criticizes R. N. Bashir for his westernized attire, and attitude to Gandhi; countering that criticism the poet says that external looks of a person does not matter at all because a farmer if washed and attired properly can look like an aristocrat and can also rule the kingdom as an old Indian proverb goes. Essentially all humanity is one and equal. The poet suggests that for a better and progressive Hindu society all must strive to destroy the hierarchy of caste and inequality.

Most of the high sounding debate between Iqbal Nath Sarshar and R. N. Bashir remains incomprehensible to Bakha but the poet's words that "Machines which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it" echoes in his ears for long. Sun sets in the

western horizon Bakha reflects on the speech of the Mahatma that a *Brahmin* and *Bhangi* (untouchable) are equal human beings. He questions himself that can he free himself from scavenging and he gets a positive answer that the machine will one day set him free from this wretched life.

Check Your Progress-VI

1. Why was Bakha expelled from home by his father? (30 words)
2. Summarize Gandhi's speech. (100 words)
3. Summarize the intellectual debate between Sarshar and Bashir. (120 words)

2.6.0 Themes

2.6.1 The Practice of Untouchability

In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* the central theme is untouchability. Caste exploitation has been prevalent in India down the ages. Lower caste people are looked down upon and ill treated by the upper caste Hindus. Mulk Raj Anand treats the theme of exploitation in the name of caste as the crux of the narrative of the novel. He presents the inhuman caste system prevalent in Hindu society in the story of the untouchable boy Bakha and shows a mirror to the society which is so oblivious of the plight of the low caste people living in the same society. He graphically presents the extent caste system affects the life of the outcastes like Bakha and his family. The story of Bakha is a microscopic representation of the general condition of the low caste people even in the twentieth century Indian society. Anand is well aware of the inherent caste system and religious divide existent in the Indian society as remnants of the caste based tradition prevalent in the past as recommended in Hindu scripture *Manu Samhita*. The inhuman episodes that Bakha is subjected to in the course his day's life in the fictional town of Bulashah Anand ruthlessly displays the upper caste prejudice towards the outcastes. The story of Bakha's life of a day in fact is a medium of highlighting the caste exploitation of the untouchables in especially Hindu society.

The sub-human existence of the untouchables is graphically presented by Anand in the very beginning of the book.

There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on the banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes, heaped up to be made into fuel cakes, and the biting, choking, pungent fumes that oozed from its sides. (1)

Bakha's day starts with the rude call of his father to wake up and go to clean the latrines of caste Hindus who are waiting for him. He carries out his task efficiently and returns only to find that there is no water at home. His sister goes to fetch water. But for a low caste woman fetching water from the community well is not a normal task. She is not allowed to climb up to the circular platform of the well as it would pollute the whole source of water of the society. So she can just wait till some caste Hindu person comes and draws water for them. She waits in the queue of already waiting outcaste women for an uncertain period of time till a caste Hindu person who is entitled to draw water from the well appears. Just for a pitcher full of water, so basic a need for sustenance of life, she has to put up with the insulting words of Gulaboo and the lustful looks of Pundit Kali Nath. When Pundit Kali Nath appears and draws water for the low caste women, he does not do it out of any sense of sympathy or fellow feeling for the outcastes but to make his bowels move and relieve him of his chronic constipation. Pundit Kali Nath's sexual assault is a display of brazen hypocrisy of the upper caste. Bakha peeps into the temple to get a view of the statues as he is not allowed to enter the place of God. The untouchables though remain in the margins of Hinduism but are deprived of the emotional shelter of religion. Bakha, as the brother of Sohini, is helpless to confront the Brahmin as he is merely an untouchable, the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Bakha has no other alternative but to digest this humiliation.

The slapping of Bakha by a caste Hindu man in the market for the crime of accidentally touching him is another instance of caste exploitation. An outcaste, as per the customs, must notify his presence by shouting "Posh keep away, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!" (42). Bakha buys cigarettes and

sweetmeat from the shops in the market. The money he gives is not accepted without purifying it by sprinkling water on it. This practice crosses all limits of degrading a human being to the level of an animal. An untouchable latrine cleaner has to collect the leftover food from the houses of upper caste Hindus; another practice of degrading a section of the society and suppressing them perpetually. Bakha goes from house to house begging for leftover food but nobody responds. He dozes off in front of a house. Again he is accused of defiling the house because he sat in front of the house. The woman in the silversmith's alley comes out to give bread to the *Sadhu* first but reluctant to give anything to Bakha. In reality the *Sadhu* has not done anything for the woman but for his higher caste he is treated well and given good food whereas Bakha who cleans their toilet and drain everyday is given food grudgingly. Before giving him bread the woman makes her child relieve in the drain so that Bakha can clean it and the wage would be the piece of bread. A familiar attitude of caste Hindus towards the outcastes. In the hockey match the boy gets injured, instinctively Bakha lifts the boy to take him to his home. The mother of the boy shouts at him for polluting his son by lifting him. His altruism soon turns into a crime. The mother of the boy becomes so blind to the reality that the person who helped in bringing the boy home is being accused of polluting him. Bakha's low caste makes him get humiliated at many junctures of his life.

Bakha wants to study and be a gentleman like the British soldiers. But the caste system prevalent in the society will not allow him to go to a school. No teacher would teach an outcaste student and no parent would send their children to study alongside an untouchable. The suppression of the untouchables is so complete that along with their present their future too has been put into uncertainty by denying them education. The upper caste domination has closed all future avenues of development for the outcastes. Anand offers three options to the untouchables at the end of the novel to change their age old destiny. First of the option to escape this caste exploitation and suppression is to convert to Christianity, the option Bakha was offered by Colonel of the Salvationist Army Mr. Hutchison. The second option is Gandhi's promise of an equal society where a Brahmin and a bhangi will enjoy equal rights as citizens of a democratic country. The third option is a hope for the future that machine would clean dung without having any human intervention. This would bring an end to the practice of manual scavenging and

set the outcastes free from their wretched life, as claimed by as the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar. The untouchables lead an undignified life because of their profession when machine will take over their work they would not be considered as untouchables anymore. Bakha thinks one day it will happen and he can escape from this suffocating life.

2.6.2 Alienation

The other most important theme of *Untouchable* is individual's growing feeling of social alienation. Since the society has looked down upon Bakha and closed all avenues of improvement in future for him he feels intensely alienated. He attempts to escape from this society which is so suffocating for him. Bakha is a normal eighteen year old young man with the usual hopes and aspirations for a better life in future. However, looking at the attitude of the upper caste people of the society towards him he is filled with a sense of pessimism. He is enamoured looking at the British soldiers (Tommies) and wants to be like them. He wants to be a gentleman by being educated. But education for an outcaste man is not only difficult but also impossible. He contacts a babu's son reading in class five and convinces him to teach him one lesson at a time for a consideration of one anna per lesson. That is his zeal for education. The incident of slapping in the market for accidentally touching a high caste Hindu further alienates him from the society. He goes to the temple wants to see the services inside but is not allowed. When Hutchinson proposes him to become a Christian he would have accepted it had Colonel Hutchinson been able to explain to Bakha who *Yessuh Messih* (Jesus Christ) is and how can he save him. He feels powerless before the monolithic system of caste in the society so cannot avenge his sister's molester when her modest is outraged by a Brahmin. Rigid caste system obstructs in the way of his realization of his aspirations which alienates him from the society. The cry of desperation of Bakha after the hockey match when he was severely scolded by the injured boy's mother "Unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?" (110)

2.6.3 Attitude of High Caste people to the Untouchables

The general attitude of the higher caste Hindus towards the outcastes is that of despise and hatred. The outcastes have been denied every opportunity to improve in their lives.

Rather they are suppressed to lead the life of an outcaste forever. The outcastes are made to depend on the higher caste for almost everything—water, education, medicine and treatment, food. For the very basic needs of life like food and water an outcaste totally depended on the upper caste. Anand's *Untouchable* is replete with such examples. Sohini cannot draw water straight from the well, she has to wait till an upper caste man appears to draw it for her. Bakha has to beg for leftover food moving from house to house to feed his family. The story Lakha tells to Bakha about the charity of *Hakim Bhagwan Das* who saved his life is also that of sheer dependency. An outcaste child cannot go to school as no teacher would teach him nor any parent would send their children to that school where an outcaste child studies. However, In the midst of upper caste despise for the outcastes there are islands of genuine compassion shown by a few high caste men. The prominent among them who treats Bakha as a human being is Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player. He allows Bakha to enter his kitchen, the most sacred corner of a Hindu household, shares his tea with him and most importantly gifts him a brand new hockey stick which makes Bakha immensely happy. But there are also show of duplicitous charity first by the Pundit who draws water for the outcastes from the well but with an ulterior motive of lust for Sohini. The woman in the silversmith alley throws a piece of bread at Bakha after making him clean the drain is also an act of upper caste charity done in self interest. In Hinduism it is believed that people born in the upper castes have done charity in their last life as a result of which they are enjoying their present life as upper caste people. So in order to have a good life in the next birth they have to do charity. So they do charity in drawing water for the outcaste, throwing bread at the outcaste and such other things. But these acts of charity are never done with any genuine love or concern for the outcastes.

2.6.3 Inter-caste relations

Untouchable does not simply present the asymmetrical relationship between the upper and lower caste people in the Hindu society. It also explores the inter-caste relationships with great detail. The Hindu caste hierarchy is divided into four broad groups—*Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras*. The class that does fall within these four categories is the outcaste. The three upper castes look down upon the last class, that is,

the Shdras, who do the menial jobs. After the molestation of Sohini by Pundit Kali Nath, Bakha felt distressed and furious. But he knew his limitations that he cannot do anything to the hypocrite Pundit as the latter belonged to the privileged class. His helplessness is reflected in:

A super specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like a tiger at bay. And yet there was a futility written on his face. (56)

Bakha cannot break the barriers of conventions, the conventions made by his superiors, the upper caste people to protect their own self interest. There is also an ambiguity in caste relations among the other low caste people. The washer man and cobbler class though regarded as low caste by the upper caste Hindus; but among themselves there is another stratification. The washerman and the cobbler feel superior to the sweeper. This has been well displayed in Bakha's relation with his friends Ram Charan and Chota. Bakha cannot marry Ram Charan's sister because he is considered low caste by the washermna community. There exists a hierarchy of caste among the untouchables. Ram Charan and Chota always regarded themselves as superior to Bakha in terms of caste. Bakha suffering insults at the hands of the upper caste man is one aspect of the caste division in the Hindu society. But again Gulabbo, the washerwoman, cannot tolerate Sohini. She is jealous of Sohini's beauty and looks down upon her for being a sweeper girl. She attacks Sohini using her caste which is the most convenient one to berate her. Mulk Raj Anand not only ruthlessly exposes the upper caste people for subjecting the untouchables to oppressive exploitation but also brings to the fore the caste consciousness even among the untouchables.

Social Realism: Religion and Caste Discrimination

Mulk Raj Anand depicts the social realism of the age in portraying the predicament of the outcastes in *Untouchable*. Society's treatment of a section of its own population in such a brutal manner speaks volumes about the degradation the society has reached. To highlight the downward trend of the society Anand highlights a day in Bakha's life and the inhuman suffering he is subjected to. The suffering of the outcastes is rooted in the age old practice of untouchability which is associated with the religion of Hinduism.

The ill treatment Bakha is subjected to for touching an upper caste man in the market, the throwing of a piece of bread at Bakha by a woman, the sexual assault on Sohini all this are part of the upper caste attitude towards the outcastes, the social realism of the age. Anand depicts a society deeply steeped in hatred for the low caste people. Bakha's money is not accepted by the pan shop owner and the confectioner before purifying show the level of caste division prevailing in the society. A distraught Bakha in exasperation cries out:

All of them abused , abused , abused why are we always abused? Because we're sweepers. I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable I am an untouchable. (43)

The woman in the silversmith's alley is reluctant to give him a piece of bread, but reverentially offers food to the Sadhu. The contrast in treatment of Bakha and the Sadhu highlights the deep rooted caste prejudice that is prevalent in the society. Bakha lifts the injured boy after the hockey match ruckus prompted by his human instincts to help an injured and unconscious boy. In return he gets a severe dressing down for touching and polluting an upper caste boy. Bakha's sense of altruism drowns in his lower caste origin. Bakha is beaten up for making physical contact, albeit unconsciously, with an upper caste man. He is accused of dereliction of duty of not announcing his presence as it was his responsibility as an outcaste to warn others so that others can be saved from getting polluted. But the social norms change upside down when Pundit Kali Nath violates the modesty of a reluctant Sohini. Even for this Sohini is accused of defiling the Pundit. Society remains a mute spectator to the crime committed by a Brahmin. Anand depicts a society steeped in caste prejudice towards the untouchables. Religion plays a decisive role in perpetuating the evil system of untouchability. Most unfortunately the untouchables are not only excluded from the normal social intercourse but also deprived from the emotional shelter of religion even when they remain within the Hindu fold.

Religion plays an important role in perpetuating the evil practice of untouchability. Colonel Hutchinson persuades Bakha to convert to Christianity to end his suffering. Bakha feels that the religion good enough for his ancestors should also be good enough for him. Thus, despite the fact that being an untouchable, he is never allowed to participate in the practices of religion yet he considers it his own. Anand depicts the

harsh reality of the sub-human existence of the untouchables in Indian society. The untouchables have been made to remain dependent on the upper caste people for every basic need of their life; be it water, food, cloth, and education. Anand also criticizes the upper caste Hindus by presenting how using religion as a base people have divided the society into hierarchical order and then misuse the privileges for their own benefit.

Anand's primary concern was to uplift the downtrodden lot who are isolated and unaccepted in the society. By bringing in the element of Gandhi as an instrument of change Anand has not only provided a solution for the plight of the untouchability in the novel but also enlightened his readers about such evil practices that need to be removed from the society. Gandhi clearly understands that the predicament of the untouchables is not only moral but also religious. He considers untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism and regards it a Satanic to think that anyone born as a Hindu to be impure and to be shunned by others. To bring about a change in the attitude towards the untouchables Gandhi suggests that the outcastes should maintain personal hygiene and give up drinking and gambling. They should also stop collecting leftover food from the houses of upper caste Hindus. All this will help in changing the attitude of other people about them.

Bakha's interaction with Iqbal Nath Sarshar and his ideas about flush latrine system has provided him with hope for the future. The novel ends with a positive note that the problem of this exploited section of the society finally will find an effective solution.

2. 7.0 Characters

2.7.1 Bakha

Bakha is the protagonist or the central figure of the novel *Untouchable*. The whole plot of the novel revolves around him. Commenting on the character of Bakha E.M. Forster writes in the 'Preface' to *Untouchable*:

Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive, we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso and heavy buttocks, as he does his nasty jobs, or stumps out in artillery boots in hopes of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hand.

Bakha, is eighteen year old sweeper boy and is a victim of the inhuman practice of untouchability. The novel is an exploration of the impact of caste cruelty on the adolescent mind of Bakha. He is Intelligent enough to be aware of the superior attitude of the higher caste Hindus around him. He is efficient in his work and works to please everyone who commands him to do the unpleasant task of cleaning toilets. He goes about doing his job with customary humility as the centuries of suppression and marginalization has made his community to be humble and submissive to tolerate all sorts of atrocities of the upper caste Hindus silently. In course of the narrative he is constantly reminded of his low birth by the abuses he receives starting from his father early in the morning to the upper caste man who slaps him in the market for touching him accidentally. Although he is a legitimate customer buying a packet of cigarettes from the roadside pan shop or *jalebis* from the confectionary; he has to be careful not to touch anything physically. His money is accepted only after purifying it by sprinkling water on it. The woman in the silversmith alley throws bread at him from a distance; he cannot think of going to a school and educate himself; in the hockey match he plays under a false identity that he is *sahib's* bearer. If his real identity is revealed that he is sweeper boy then other boys would not play with him. The mother of the injured boy after the hockey match uses select expletives to berate him for being an outcaste and touching her child; even Mary Hutchinson, Colonel Hutchinson's wife, shouts at her husband for moving about with a 'blackie'. All these becomes so suffocating for him that in sheer desperation he cries "Unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?" (P-110) The discrimination and humiliation he is subjected to makes him a rebel. He wants to fight against the injustice and suppression he and his community suffers at the hands of the upper caste Hindus.

He shows a great fascination for English clothes and English way of life and wants to be like them. This shows his inclination to reject the Indian roots and adopt a culture that treats him as an equal human being without caste prejudice. When he was slapped by an upper caste Hindu in the market for touching him, from the hostile crowd a Mohammedan *tongawala* has saved him. The attitude of the British soldiers and the Mohmmadans to him was normal without any caste prejudice and this has not escaped the notice of Bakha. At the end of the novel Bakha was offered three options as solution

to his problem —conversion to Christianity, Gandhi's way of a pious life and promise of an equal society, and waiting for the machine, the flush system of latrine. He rejects the first option of conversion outright. He thinks that if the present gods are good enough for his forefathers then they must be good enough for him too. What inspires him is the word of Gandhi that he has the *shakti* to bring about a change in the society where a *Brahmin* and a *Bahngi* (Toilet cleaner) will be considered equal. What he understands from the discussion between Iqbal Nath Sarshar and R. N. Bashir, the Barrister, that a machine will be introduced which would clean the latrines without any human intervention. This machine will bring about the real emancipation of the untouchables. Bakha becomes an optimist in the end of the novel. Mulk Raj Anand has presented Bakha in a condition where he struggles for a space in the society, but at the same time he doesn't leave his duty. Here he starts as a man who has to fight for his position in a largely hostile society. He believes that man is the master of his destiny and can change his fate by his own efforts howsoever faint the chances may be. The solution is not in tolerating the atrocities, but in finding out the solution to the problem of the ages-long oppressions and atrocities.

The story of Bakha is a story of attainment of self realization living in the midst of a prejudiced and highly hostile society. As In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* Moorthy represents the Gandhi and Gandhian ideals, in *Untouchable* Bakha represents the downtrodden and the marginalized sections of the low caste Hindus in the Indian society. He struggles to find his own identity and mooring in the society. He is constantly in search of a better future, where there will be equality and no discrimination on the basis of one's birth and caste. Ultimately he finds the meaning to his life hearing the inspiring speech of Mahatma Gandhi and a future where there is possibility that he would not have to remain a sweeper forever.

2.7.2 Lakha, the Father

Lakha is the father of the family of three children—Bakha, Rakha and Sohini. He is the *Jamedar* or the head of the sweepers. He is, by nature, dirty, lazy, and foul mouthed. He is out and out a selfish person who always thinks of his own comforts and never bothers about his motherless children. Centuries of slavery has made him peevish, meek, weak,

short tempered and a self centred man. Left with three children after his wife's death, he accepts his low position in the society, totally submissive to the high caste Hindus. Early in the morning he wakes up Bakha with insensitive abuses and forces him to go on the usual servility to the upper caste Hindus. Lakha has accepted servility to the core and hence is incapable of thinking of any revolt or resentment. He regards the high caste Hindus as superior to them because of their birth and respects them as his masters. The *Hakim* Bhagwan Das episode is a pointer to this. Bakha was seriously sick as a child and no doctor would treat him as he was an untouchable. Lakha goes to the *Hakim* and begs to treat Bakha. First he refuses to come but later he does come and treat Bakha. Lakha, unlike Bakha, does not have that fire for change and reform that burns in Bakha. Lakha symbolizes the common, submissive untouchable man of the Indian society.

2.7.3. Sohini

Sohini is the daughter of Lakha and sister of Bakha in the outcaste family. She is young and beautiful, modest and hard working. She has to take the household responsibility besides the cleaning of toilets of high caste Hindus, it is Sohini's beauty that evokes jealousy in Gulaboo. Pundit Kali Nath is physically attracted to her and does not hesitate to sexually assault her despite the fact that she is an untouchable. has ulterior motives behind giving her a pitcher of water at the well, an important character in the novel because through her Anand tries to expose the moral corruption and hypocrisy that prevails in the upper caste Hindu society. Hypocrites like Pundit Kali Nath practice untouchability but given an opportunity do not hesitate to sexually assault an untouchable girl. Through the episode of Pundit Kali Nath's attempted sexual assault on Sohini, the novelist exposes the inherent contradiction in the Hindu upper caste attitude to the outcastes.

2.7.4 Minor Characters

Rakha

Rakha, the brother of Bakha and the second son of Lakha, represents all the negative aspects associated with the untouchable community. He symbolizes the dirty and unclean life of the untouchables. He himself is personally dirty and repulsive. He is also

a very lazy by nature. He is an untouchable in the real sense of the term. When Mahatma Gandhi says that untouchables too need to reform themselves, he has untouchables like Rakha in mind.

Colonel Hutchinson

Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of the Salvationist Army, is the padre of the local church. His mission of life is to convert as much low caste Hindus as possible to Christianity. He speaks about the concept of equality of every human being in Christianity to Bakha. He offers to convert Bakha to Christianity where he would be treated as an equal human being. He tries to explain to Bakha the idea of *Yessuh Messih* (Jesus Christ), and the Christian concepts like Heaven and hell, sin, savior, sacrifice. However, he could not explain in a convincing way who *Yessuh Messih* is and why did he die. The sketchy picture of Christianity Mr. Hutchinson puts before Bakha, fails to convince him to convert. Mr. Hutchinson believed that if the missionaries in India are to succeed in converting the low caste Hindus into Christianity then they have to come in close contact with this downtrodden and marginalized Indians. His dress is funny mixture of Indian and European, a pair of white trousers, a scarlet jacket, a white turban and a red band across it. For him conversion to Christianity is the only alternative to put an end to the caste system. The three options Bakha is offered in the novel as solution to the problem of untouchability, conversion to Christianity is one of them. Colonel Hutchinson represents the Christian missionaries who wanted to convert the gullible untouchables. However, the attitude of Mary Hutchinson, Hutchinson's wife, exposes the inherent racism that prevailed even among the Europeans about the native untouchables when she shouts at her husband for moving around with 'blackies'.

Havildar Charat Singh

Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player, is an interesting character in the novel. He is an army *Havildar* of Dogra regiment posted at Bulashah. He lives in the barracks where Bakha goes everyday to clean the latrines. He is ill tempered may be because of the piles he suffers from. Havildar Charat Singh is a contrast to the other high caste character Pundit Kali Nath. If Pundit Kali Nath and other high caste Hindus symbolize hypocrisy, cruelty, discrimination and injustice, Havildar Charat Singh

represents that section of Hindu high caste people who are considerate and hold progressive views in the same Hindu society. The unique aspect of Havildar Charat Singh's character is that he is free from caste prejudice and treats Bakha humanely and affectionately unlike the other orthodox upper caste Hindus who tend to berate him. He allows Bakha to enter his kitchen, the most sacred corner of a Hindu household, to fetch burning coal for his *hookah* (the hubble bubble) and also shares tea with him, quite surprising considering the attitude of the other high caste Hindus to untouchables. He also gifts Bakha with a brand new hockey stick. All these shows Havildar Charat Singh as an affectionate human being and a man who holds progressive views about the untouchables. Havildar Charat Singh is free from the caste prejudice towards the low caste Hindus.

Bakha, throughout the day, has not found any affection from any body. It is only Charat Singh who shows a humanistic attachment to him. Through the portrayal of the character of Charat Singh, Anand stops from tarring the whole Hindu upper caste community in the same brush. There are characters like Charat Singh who is an exception.

Mahatma Gandhi

It goes to the credit of Mulk raj Anand that he delineated the real character of Gandhi in his novel *Untouchable*. Describing the charismatic power of Gandhi Anand writes:

This strange man seemed to have the genius that could be a single dramatic act, rally multicoloured, multi-tongued India to himself. (134)

Gandhi appears as messiah for Bakha who has lost all hopes of future. It is Gandhi's promise of an impending social reformation where a Brahmin and a Bhangi will enjoy equal rights fills Bakha with a sense of optimism. Gandhi's scathing attack on the practice of untouchability inspires Bakha. When Gandhi says that untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism, he strikes a chord in the heart of Bakha.

Iqbal Nath Sarshar

Iqbal Nath Sarshar, the young poet and the editor of *Nuwan Jug*, is a man with revolutionary and progressive ideas. He is strongly against idea of untouchability. He

serves the purpose of the mouthpiece of the author. He acts like the spokesperson of the author in articulating the vision of the future of India where machines will overtake human intervention in cleaning latrines thereby putting an end to manual scavenging effectively. He provides a real and practicable solution to the problem of untouchability by the introduction of flush system.

The practice of untouchability is the one of the most evil practices in Hinduism. It is practiced even today in some societies and dalits and low caste people being the victims. Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar have spoken against it most vehemently. Society cannot progress if one section of the society is excluded by the other section.

NARRATIVE STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Mulk raj Anand adopts a unique narrative style to tell the story of Bakha. He adopts the stream of consciousness technique in which was the dominant narrative technique of the period being followed by the prominent literary persons of the age like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and others. This technique is used to delve deep into the mind of the central character Bakha who is tormented by the mistreatment meted out to him by the society. *Untouchable* can be regarded as a psychological novel as well for it gives us a vivid account of Bakha's thoughts and ponderings most of which are fragmentary in nature.

The novel has also dream sequence in which Bakha finds himself surrounded by a group of monkeys. Through this the novelist wants to project the world view of Bakha which even haunts him in his subconscious mind and confines him within a bleak world.

There are also a number of flashbacks used along with symbolic images and thoughts combined with an awareness of the reality that renders an element of modernity to the novel.

Anand uses a number of images that are recurrent in the novel, mostly the images of the sun and the river. The sun is the symbol of creativity and vital force of life and is seen as a contrast to the lives of the people like Bakha and others.

The image of the river is symbolic of the anguish and grief of the people as it stands for the flow of existence which is past change. It symbolizes that nothing can change for the downtrodden outcastes.

The novelist uses a number of words, phrases, and idioms which reflect the Indian way of speaking. There are many words in Hindi and Punjabi that have not been translated into English like *girja ghar*, *jalebi*, *babu*, *harijan* etc. Whereas some abusive words in Hindi are translated into English like 'Son of a pig, swine, dog' etc. The aim was to capture the flavor and colour of a particular village in Punjab during pre-independence times and give a realistic representation to it.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the relevance of the novel *Untouchable* in the present context of Indian society.
2. Present character sketch of Bakha.
3. Prepare a note on the treatment of theme of untouchability in the novel *Untouchability*.
4. Discuss the theme of social alienation in the novel *Untouchable*.
5. Comment on the symbolic significance of Pundit Kali Nath's sexual assault on Sohini.
6. Prepare a note on social realism as represented in the novel *Untouchable*.

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UNIT-8: NATION AND THE NOVEL: *KANTHAPURA* (1938)

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.0 Learning Objectives

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Critical aspects of the novel

8.2.1 Myth as technique of narration

8.2.2 Characters

8.2.3 Themes

8.3 Let us Sum Up/Conclusion

8.4 Glossary

8.5 Terminal questions

8.6 Reference/Further reading

8.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the earlier unit you have studied Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. In this unit you will be introduced to another famous novelist of Indian Writing in English of early twentieth century Raja Rao. His first and most unique novel *Kanthapura* was published in 1938 which deals with the historical event of India's freedom struggle. After going through this Unit *you* will be able to:

- Familiarize yourself with the life and literary career of Raja Rao
- Form an idea about the background of the novel
- Understand the plot and action of the novel
- Acquaint yourself with the theme and characters of the novel
- Familiarize yourself with the narrative technique and style of the novel
- Understand Raja Rao's art of characterization
- Form a critical opinion about the novel

8.1 INTRODUCTION

RAJA RAO (1908-2006): THE NOVELIST

Raja Rao was born in Hasan, in the princely state of Mysore (present Karnataka) on 8th November 1908. His mother Gauramma died when Raja Rao was only four years old. He was deeply affected by the death of his mother in his early childhood. His father H. V. Krishnaswamy was teacher of Kannada at Nizam College in Hyderabad. Rao had his early education in a Madrasa in Hyderabad and completed his Matriculation in 1927. He took admission in Nizam College under the Osmania

University. During this period he became friendly with Ahmed Ali, who became a famous short story writer in Urdu in Pakistan after he migrated there at the time of Partition. Rao learned French after he obtained his graduation from the University of Madras with major in English and History. He won the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad in 1929. He went to France and studied French language and literature in the University of Montpellier. He returned to India in 1939 and participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. Later he travelled to the United States of America and took up teaching assignment at the University of Texas from 1966 to 1986. After his retirement as Emeritus Professor he died of heart attack in Austin, Texas on 8th July 2006 at his home..

Apart from the 1938 novel *Kanthapura*, which we are going to study in detail in this unit he has written a number of other novels too. After publishing *Kanthapura* in 1938 he remained silent for many years without publishing anything. Critics wrote him off as an ‘erupted volcano’. But in 1960 he came up with his second novels *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) followed by *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976), *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (1988). Apart from novels Raja Rao has also written a number of great short stories. Some of his famous short story collections are: *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978), *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989). Apart from novels and short stories Raja Rao has also written some non-fiction prose. Some of his non-fiction prose are: *Changing India: An Anthology* (1939), *Tomorrow* (1943–44), *Whither India?* (1948), *The Meaning of India*, (essays) (1996), *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, (biography) (1998).

For his literary achievements he was awarded the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1964. In 1969 the Government of India conferred the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award, on him. He was also awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India’s second highest civilian award, in 2007 posthumously. Apart from all these national awards he was conferred the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in the year 1988.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I

1. Write a brief note on the literary career of Raja Rao.

8.2 INTRODUCTION TO KANTHAPURA

Kanthapura (1938) is the story of a small village caught in middle of the tumultuous period of Indian freedom struggle. Raja Rao brings in the theme of freedom struggle of India under the charismatic leadership of Gandhi and the impact of his idealism on the ordinary people of India. Kanthapura, a small non-descript village in the Malabar coast of South India is presented as a microcosm of India, that is, what was happening all over India at that time was happening in Kanthapura too. The young and radical Moorthy brings in the ideals of Gandhism to this insignificant village Kanthapura. He faces the opposition of the forces of orthodoxy and the conservative. However, he motivates the womenfolk of the village to spin their own cloth, be truthful, and remain away from the evil of casteism and untouchability. In order to achieve this Moorthy plays the card of religion. He brings in *Harikatha* (legendary narrative of god) which introduces Gandhi as an epic hero fighting the evils of foreign rule. The women of Kanthapura gets so deeply indoctrinated that they lose their families, property, land, home and hearth, also suffer grievous physical injury in their non-violent *Satyagraha* to defend the rights of the coolies working in the nearby Skeffington Coffee Estate. Waging a struggle against the oppressive British government represented by the White men and the Muslim police man Bade Khan they become local heroes. The novel highlights the Gandhian conviction in the revolutionary potential of the women. This revolutionary potential of the rural women is represented in Ratna, the young progressive widow of Kanthapura. The novel concludes on the note of Gandhi-Nehru debate. The Gandhian Moorthy advises the people to be more attentive to the Nehruvian concept of 'equal distribution of wealth' among the members of the society. Moorthy in the end of the novel finds Gandhi too soft towards the British and his saintly doctrines are too inadequate for the realpolitik of nationalism. However, the women are unconvinced as they feel if there is anyone who can bring *Swaraj* to India is only Gandhi. The theme the novel revolves around Gandhi and his struggle to free India from the foreign domination. The style of narration makes the novel a Gandhi *Purana* as Gandhi is represented as the invisible god and Moorthy, the protagonist, as the visible *avatar*. The central conflict in the novel is the clash between the forces of evil, represented by the British colonial government and their supporters; and the forces of good represented by the *Satyagrahis* led by Moorthy. The characters belong clearly to the either side of this good-evil dichotomy. There are other conflicts too like the ruler and the ruled, conservatism against reformation, exploiter against the exploited. Commenting on *Kanthapura*, critic K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger writes:

Gandhi is the invisible God, Moorthy is the visible avatar. The reign of the red-men is Asuric rule, and it is resisted by the Devas, the satyagrahais. The characters sharply divide into two camps: the Rulers (and their supporters) on the one hand and the Satyagrahis (and their sympathisers) on the other. (*Indian Writing in English*, 391)

8.3 KANTHAPURA: THE NOVEL

FOREWORD

Raja Rao has written a *Preface* or a *Foreword* to the novel *Kanthapura*. The *Foreword* is a significant critical document to understand the challenges an Indian writer encounters while telling an Indian story in English. He talks candidly about these difficulties and chiefly divides them into three broad categories-- (i) style to be adopted while telling an Indian story (ii) describing Indian experiences in English and (iii) narrative technique to be adopted.

Raja Rao admits that there is cultural and historical gap between English language and Indian story. Discussing the challenges of telling an Indian story in English, Raja Rao says that every village of India has a legendary history, what he calls *Sthala-purana*. The belief that a god or a godlike figure has left behind some semblance of memory in a particular place, and such local legends are used as the ingredients of a story. These legendary stories have a strong root in the Indian psyche. There is a strong belief among Indians in the local legends such as --- Rama might have rested under a particular *pipal* tree of the village or Sita might have dried her clothes on this yellow stone after taking bath in the local river. These beliefs take shape in legendary stories that bring in the past to mingle with the present and the gods to mingle with men. These legendary stories are told by grandmothers in a style that has drawn attention of listeners all around the country. The writer states that he is trying to imitate that grandmotherly style of story-telling in this novel, that ‘unpunctuated tempo of Indian life.’

However, he writes in the *Foreword* that the “The telling has not been easy.” The main challenge in telling an Indian story in English has its own inherent challenges. He does not consider English as an alien or foreign language but finds it unsuitable and inadequate to express the Indian emotional make-up. Raja Rao considers English as a language for the intellectual make –up of Indians like Sanskrit and Parsee used to be in the past. Language is always embedded in culture

and English is not an adequate medium to express the nuanced expressions of Indian cultural ethos. An Indian writer writing in English and narrating Indian experiences faces this problem of authenticity in expression. Explaining this inherent problem of an Indian writer writing in English Raja Rao writes:

One has to convey this various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. (Foreword, *Kanthapura*)

The intellectual make-up of Indians may be English but they prefer to express their emotional states in their own mother tongue. When such an Indian-centric emotional state is to be described in English then it needs to be moulded into an Indian variety befitting to the Indian style of expressions. He asserts “”We cannot write like the English. We should not” emphasizing on the need for a variety of Indian English, a distinctive dialect in which Indian emotional expressions can be expressed adequately. Speaking on the fast tempo of Indian life and its narration in literature Raja Rao states that the great Indian epic Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the *Ramayana* has 48,000 verses. Similarly there are several *puranas* which are endless and innumerable. Indian story telling is interminable in nature as one episode follows another in an endless nature. One thought gives way to another in quick succession without caring for punctuations. This has been the style of story-telling in India and Raja Rao says that he attempts to follow this rapid style episodic narration in telling the story of *Kanthapura*.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-II

1. What does Raja Rao say about the use of English while telling an Indian story?
2. What challenges does an Indian writer face while narrating an Indian story in English?

8.4 PLOT SUMMARY OF KANTHAPURA

Kanthapura is a story of the Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and its impact on the lives of the ordinary village folk in a remote village Kanthapura in South India. The story is narrated in fast pace by an elderly Brahmin woman Achakka who has a keen sense of

observation and a very sharp memory that enables her to recollect every minute happenings in the village. She narrates the story in a non-episodic manner describing the characters, their background and also the village gods and goddesses. Achakka, the narrator of the story, begins her story by describing the geographical surrounding of the village Kanthapura. The village is situated in the Western Ghats mountain range in the south-west India. The British colonialists have recently made it a centre of spice trade. The patron deity of the village is Kenchamma who, according to legends, had protected the village from a monster long ago. She introduces the prominent Brahmin residents as well as the members of other castes residing in the village of Kanthapura to the readers.

The society of Kanthapura is caste ridden and the residential areas are demarcated on the basis of caste. Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel, is an educated Brahmin young man who is also a resident of this village. Achakka introduces the marginalized communities like the potters, weavers and also the pariahs or the untouchables who live in decrepit huts in the outskirts of the village. The other characters who reside in the village are-- the Brahmin money lender Bhatta, and the shrewd but honest Patel Range Gowda, the land revenue collector of the village.

Once Moorthy discovers a *Shiva linga* in the backyard of Achakka and in order to consecrate and erect a temple for the *Shiva Linga* he raises money from the villagers. He also proposes to hold a *Harikatha* by inviting a famous *Harikatha* man Jayaramachar from the city. The unique feature of Jayaramachar's *Harikatha* is that along with the tales of gods and goddesses he mingled the tale of Mahatma Gandhi. He painted the British government (the red man's government) as the villain and Gandhi as the savior of the Indians by promising them *Swaraj*. A Muslim policeman Bade Khan is sent by the government to Kanthapura to maintain law and order. He comes searching for a rented house and Patel Range Gowda refuses to give him house on rent. Finding no other alternative Bade Khan moves into the Skeffington Coffee Estate owned by an Englishman who offers him accommodation there. Moorthy preaches Gandhism among the villagers. He spreads among the villagers the message of Gandhi and the harm that is caused to the local weavers by the imported clothes. He explains to the ignorant villagers how the exploitation of the British government has left the people of Kanthapura poor. He advises the villagers to spin their own cloth by weaving *khadi* cloth to make the villagers self reliant. Moorthy also preaches for the abolition of caste system so that equality can be brought to the society. Bhatta, who has rose from his humble background to become a wealthy money lender by exploiting the poor farmers, is

antagonistic to Gandhism and Moorthy's progressive ideas of a modern India. Many villagers of Kanthapura rally around Bhatta and are opposed to Moorthy. Notable among the opposition party to Moorthy are – Waterfall Venkamma, the talkative woman, the Brahmin priest Rangappa and his wife Lakshamma, and even Moorthy's own mother Narsamma. Moorthy despite the opposition from certain quarters is determined to spread Gandhian ideals among the people of Kanthapura. In his mission of spreading Gandhism Moorthy he is supported by a wealthy widow Rangamma. Moorthy uses the big house of Rangamma as his store house to keep spinning wheels and books about non-violent resistance to foreign domination. Moorthy faces the formidable challenge from the Swami, the religious leader in Mysore who issues a diktat that anybody who attempts to disturb the traditional social system by interacting with the untouchables will be excommunicated. This order of the Swami disturbs Moorthy's mother Narsamma because she knows that her son would be the first victim of Swami's wrath. She refuses to associate herself with Moorthy's mission. Nothing deviates moorthy from his mission and as expected he gets excommunicated by the Swami when he is seen carrying a corpse of a pariah member of the society. His mother becomes distraught and dies on the banks of river Himavathy of shock at his excommunication. After the death of his mother Moorthy moves into the house of Rangamma, the wealthy widow and resides there.

The narrative now moves to Skeffington Coffee House where the foreman or the *maistri* used to convince the poor people from the plains below the Ghats stretching up to river Godavary. These poor people are lured by the foreman with promises of a bright life and great wages. But once they joined the coffee plantation they came to know the reality of the harsh working condition of the coffee plantation. The founder owner of the coffee plantation was called 'hunter sahib' because he moved with a hunter in his hand all the time whipping the helpless workers arbitrarily. He was a very cruel owner and was a womanizer too. He everyday raped a woman worker of his coffee estate. Once he ordered a Brahmin worker girl to be sent to this bungalow. The father of the girl worker refused to do so and an enraged owner shot the father dead. He promised to give the bereaved family two thousand rupees but later conveniently forgot to pay. The court of the red men forgave him. After his death his nephew took over the management of the coffee plantation. He was kinder than his predecessor except in matters of woman. He remained as exploitative as his predecessor. The condition of the workers remained the same irrespective of who the master is. To keep the workers in a state of perpetual poverty the management encouraged them to take

to toddy drinking. The inhuman exploitation of the workers in the coffee estate drew the attention of Moorthy. He is invited to the estate by two progressive and enlightened Brahmin clerks Gangadhar and Vasudev. One day Moorthy was at the gate of the coffee estate and Bade Khan, the police officer, prevented him from entering the estate. The Foreman with his supporters also gathered there and Vasudev and Gangadhar too came to the spot with coolies who supported Moorthy. A scuffle ensued and the coolies pounced upon Bade Khan and the Foreman. Moorthy controlled the situation by dissuading the coolies especially the women not to take recourse to violence as they are followers of Gandhi and believe in non-violence. As soon as the women workers stopped beating the Foreman he immediately started whipping the women workers in rage. The next day the Coffee Estate management expelled Rachanna, his wife Racha, and their two orphaned grandchildren out of the hut from the Skeffington Coffee Estate. They were given shelter by Patel Range Gowda in Kanthapura. This is how Rachanna and his family came to live in Kanthapura. The scuffle at the Skeffington Coffee Estate profoundly influenced Moorthy. The incident has created a lot of bad blood between the representatives of the estate—the Foreman and Bade Khan on one hand and the coolies on the other. One of the women workers of the estate had caught hold of the beard of Bade Khan which is completely wrong as it goes against the Gandhian doctrine of non-violence. So Moorthy, taking personal responsibility for the unfortunate incident, wanted to purify himself by fasting. He sat on a three day fast at the temple. During the course of his fasting he got visions of gods like Shiva and Hari. Rangamma, the wealthy widow, the wise elderly Brahmin Ramkrishnayya and the progressive widow Ratna took care of Moorthy when he was sitting on the fast. Moorthy's resolve became stronger at the face of threats from Waterfall Venkamma and Bhatta. He resolved to launch a new movement to make people aware and make them not to cooperate with the government called 'don't touch the government campaign'.

Moorthy wanted to form a Congress Committee in Kanthapura and approached Patel Range Gowda. He realized that Range Gowda is the most influential man in the village and if he joins Congress all others would automatically follow path. He explained his proposal to Range Gowda that first there will be a Congress Committee in Kanthapura which will be affiliated to the All India Congress of Mahatma Gandhi. Each member of the Congress Committee will have to pay four annas or two thousand yards of yarn per year. Range Gowda very carefully heard Moorthy's proposal. His only concern was that if he joins Congress will it bring any trouble from the government's side for him. But Moorthy persuaded him to join the Congress and Range Gowda

joined. Then Moorthy proceeded to the weavers' street and met their elder Ramayya. When Ramayya heard that Range Gowda had agreed to join the Congress he too readily agreed to join. Moorthy then went to the potters' quarters and met their head Siddayya. He too agreed to join without much fuss. Finally Moorthy visited to the pariah quarters where he had to go through a litmus test. The head of the pariahs Rachanna was not in the house and his wife invited Moorthy into their house and offered him a glass of milk. Being a Brahmin himself Moorthy has never entered a pariah house before and if he entered a pariah house he has to go through a purification ritual. However he did enter the pariah house and accepted the glass of milk. These pariah women are simple and ignorant folk. They do not understand the message of Mahatma Gandhi. When Moorthy told them about joining Congress they could not give a decision immediately and said to Moorthy to come in the evening again after their men folk returns home. Soon Moorthy rushed back to Rangamma's place and told of his Pariah street experience to her. He took a bath, changed his clothes and drank Ganga water to purify himself. In the evening he made a round of the village trying to convince people to join Congress. All of whom he approached agreed to join the Congress. He convened a meeting of the Congress Committee along with Range Gowda. In the meeting Moorthy was elected as the president and Range Gowda as the protector and along with them twenty one members were also elected to the committee. They all vowed to seek the truth, spin every day, and practice ahimsa or non-violence. Moorthy's photograph was published in the newspaper as the president of the Kanthapura Congress Committee and the people of the village felt greatly privileged seeing Moorthy's photograph.

Bhatta did not like the establishment of branch of the Congress in Kanthapura. He thought of a plan to sabotage Moorthy's popularity and the Congress party. He charged double interest on the money he lent to those who supported Moorthy. Bhatta's plan was that by charging double interest on the supporters of Moorthy he would very soon take over their landed property and ruin them financially. Secondly he wanted an enemy of Moorthy to support him in his fight against him. He selected Waterfall Venkamma who is always critical of Moorthy as his companion. He planned that Waterfall Venkamma has a daughter of marriageable age. Her name was Ranga. Waterfall Venkamma always was worried about her marriage. Bhatta planned to arrange the marriage of Ranga with an advocate Seenappa who was over thirty years of age and was a widower. He has three children from his first wife. But he was a rich man and Waterfall Venkamma wanted a rich man as her son in law. As expected Waterfall Venkamma agreed to the proposal of marriage of

her daughter and a marriage date was scheduled. The village folk were happy at the news of the marriage as there would be feasting for several days at a stretch. But on the day of the marriage they found an middle aged, ugly man as the bride groom but the villagers soon were carried away the show of wealth and enjoyed the marriage ceremony.

In the month of kartik one late night there was a great commotion in Kannayya's House. Everyone thought that old Ramakrishnayya has passed away that night. But it was soon discovered that it was the arrival of police which has caused so much of commotion. The police have arrived to arrest Moorthy. The police party was led by an Inspector accompanied by Bade Khan and they arrested Moorthy. A huge crowd gathered when the news of Moorthy's arrest spread. The Inspector ordered Bade Khan to bind Moorthy. Rachanna came forward and shouted "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" and the crowd repeated it. The police started beating up the people present there with lathis and arrested a total of seventeen people from Kanthapura and took them away. The next day others were released after a sound beating but Moorthy was taken to Karwar. Many advocates showed interest to take up the case of Moorthy. A defence committee was formed to provide legal service to Moorthy. But Moorthy did not like all these as he believed that truth is on his side and he is not afraid of anything as he has a great conviction in his own truthfulness. He politely declined all legal assistance and decided to fight his battle on his own terms as Gandhi has taught him. There was only one advocate who supported Moorthy's idea of fighting his own legal battle. He was advocate Sankar, who was also the secretary of the Karwar Congress committee.

The Congress volunteers organized a massive public meeting. Many speakers delivered speeches there. An old man who was paid by the Swami, the British agent, defended the caste system and the need to preserve the purity of Hindu religion and also spoke supporting the Sovereign Queen of England. Many other speakers spoke of Hindu-Muslim unity and the people shouted "Mahatma Ganhi ki jai". Advocate Ranganna was the last to speak and he delivered a very powerful speech and eulogized Gandhi by praising his sense of dedication that how he has sacrificed everything for the people of India. He exposed the selfishness of the government agents like the Swami in the town and some Brahmins who still preach of caste system. At the end of his speech he was arrested. After the arrest of Ranganna a huge protest march was taken out. The police brutally dispersed the protest march. The next day people of Kanthapura came to know of all these from the newspaper

published by Rangamma. They understood that Bhatta is a government agent. They observed that he is now seen more and more with Bade Khan and after sometime he left Kanthapura for Kashi.

Many weeks passed and Moorthy remained in jail in Karwar. His followers in Kanthapura became restless but could not do anything to release him from the jail. The police case against him accused him of instigating the pariahs to attack the police at the gate of Skeffington Coffee Estate. Finding no alternative to save Moorthy the villagers started praying to the local deity Kenchama to destroy this tyrannical government. Rangamma along with Gandhian Nanjamma went to Karwar and stayed with advocate Sankar who was a pious lawyer and never took up false cases, an ardent follower of Gandhi who always wore khadi and even refused to attend marriage ceremonies if everyone there did not wear khadi. News reached Kanthapura that the red men's judge has sentenced Moorthy to three month's rigorous imprisonment. The whole of Kanthapura became sad at this cruel judgement. The colonial British government replaced Range Gowda with another man as the Patel of Kanthapura. Wise and elderly Ramakrishnayya died after stumbling into a pillar during heavy rain. He was cremated on the banks of river Himavathy and the overflowing river washed away his ashes.

After Rama Krishnayya's death the villagers faced a problem and that was there was nobody to interpret the Vedic texts and philosophy to them. Rangamma offered to fill that vacuum by offering her service to interpret the Vedic texts to the villagers. Now Ratna, the progressive widow, would read out the texts and Rangamma would interpret them to the villagers. The villagers were greatly impressed by the profound knowledge of Rangamma in philosophy and religious texts. They thought that after her return from the city and stay with advocate Sankar she has become more intelligent and knowledgeable. When people asked her about the secret of her strength and depth of knowledge she replied that she has been undergoing yoga lessons under the guidance of her spiritual guru Sadhu Narayan. The womenfolk got interested in practicing yoga and Rangamma encouraged them to do so. She also encouraged the womenfolk of Kanthapura to form a Sevika Sangha or Women's Volunteer Corps. She inspired them by telling them the stories of Rani lakshmi Bai and the Rajput women who preferred to burn themselves by jumping into the pyre than surrendering to the enemy. She also told them stories of Annie Besant, Kamal Devi and Sorojini Naidu. The members of the Women's Volunteer Corps regularly trained at Rangamma's courtyard. She taught them to follow the Gandhian ideal of non-violence strictly even in the face

of extreme police brutalities. She taught to her women followers that violence can only hurt the body not the soul. Seenu and Vasudev, two young men of Kanthapura too wanted to form a similar volunteers group of boys but could not succeed as in the absence of Moorthy there was nobody to inspire them. Instead they decided to start bhajan singing in the temple every evening. The conch again was blown in the temple and everything became as it used to be when Moorthy was present in the village.

The month of *Vaisakh* came. It was the season of ploughing and sowing in the field. This must be done on an auspicious day. The priest of the Kenchamma temple was consulted to decide a date for the commencement of the agricultural process of the season. Range Gowda was no longer the patel of the village yet the villagers invited him to lead the procession as they used to do earlier. Now it is also the time for Moorthy's return from the jail and the people of Kanthapura wanted to give him a rousing welcome on his return from prison. Rangamma's newspaper informed the people that Moorthy was released from jail. There was great enthusiasm to welcome Moorthy back to the village. Waterfall Venkamma wanted to play spoilsport by keeping her daughter's marriage on the same day of Moorthy's release so that at least the Brahmins of the village will not go to Moorthy's welcome ceremony. Finally Moorthy did return to Kanthapura, most of the Brahmins remained present at Waterfall Venkamma's daughter's marriage but Rangamma, Ratna and few other Brahmins did go the welcome ceremony of Moorthy. People shouted "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" and the police Inspector advised them not create any trouble and Rangamma too advised them to go home and they obeyed. The police left a younger bade Khan at the Skeffington Coffee Estate when they left Kanthapura late at night.

Moorthy, after his release from the prison, took charge of the reformation movement in Kanthapura against social maladies. He told people to remain prepared for an agitation the call of which is soon to issued from the Karwar Congress Committee and that would be 'Don't touch the government' campaign. This campaign would coincide with Gandhi's Dandi march to break the British government's exploitative and unjustified levying of salt tax. They will fast and pray as a part of this campaign. The news of Gandhi's Dandi March reached Kanthapura and the news of the rousing welcome the Mahatma received in every village he visited on way to the Dandi sea-shore thrilled the villagers in Kanthapura. Inspired by Gandhi's March one hundred and seventy Patels, who were assigned the responsibility to collect tax from the people, have resigned from

their posts. Moorthy mobilized the people and made them vow to follow the Gandhian ideals such as – to speak the truth, to spin yarn for themselves and not to depend on the foreign manufactured cloth, not to practice untouchability and treat every human being as equal, and finally to love everyone without having any sense of hatred or ill-will for any.

The news of Gandhi's Dandi March continuously reached the village. The news that Gandhi finally reached Dandi sea shore and broke the salt law by preparing a handful of salt and then a lot of people broke the salt law and made cartloads of salt. Gandhi and many of his followers were arrested. The news inspired the people of Kanthapura. They waited for the orders of Karwar Congress Committee for action. Along with Kanthapura all villages in India prepared to launch a nationwide agitation against the oppressive British rule. Finally the call for action came from Karwar Congress Committee. Nobody will pay any tax to the government and will not cooperate with the government in any way. Immediately a parallel government was established and Range Gowda reappointed as the Patel by the people of the village and thus started the 'Don't touch the government' campaign in Kanthapura.

Moorthy and his followers decided to rid the society of the curse of drinking toddy, an intoxicant prepared from the toddy tree. This habit of drinking toddy has ruined many coolies by wreaking financial havoc in their lives. Moorthy decided that a non-violent picketing will be organized in Boranna's Toddy Grove, the centre of toddy production. He advised all his followers first to purify themselves before taking up the task of reforming the society. The followers of Gandhi purified themselves by fasting and praying regularly before joining the picketing. In this way the followers of Moorthy were psychologically prepared for a long struggle against the oppressive British government.

On the appointed day, that is a Friday, one hundred and thirty nine men, women and children marched together to the Boranna Toddy Grove to picket and to eradicate the malady of drinking from Kanthapura. The moment the *Satyagrahis* reached the place and were about to start their protest, a police inspector came and warned them that they cannot hold picketing here as it is against the law. The picketers did not heed the police warning and marched ahead. The police in order to stop them beat them up with *lathis*. Many women, men and children got injured yet the atmosphere echoed with the shouting of "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai" and "Vande Mataram". The police arrested many people. The police arrested three villagers: the pariah Rachanna and the

potters Lingayya and Siddayya. The arrested *Satyagrahis* were taken by the police in waiting lorries to the Santur police station. Some leaders were sent to the police lock up and others were loaded in trucks and left in a deserted and remote place where there was no transportation available to return. So the picketers had to walk down the distance to reach Kanthapura. They had to walk through dark and frightening forests to reach Kanthapura. After reaching Kanthapura they were welcomed by Rangamma's cousin Subbayya.

Tuesday is the market day at Kanthapura and on that day a lot of coolies come to Boranna Toddy Booth near the gate of the Skeffington Coffee Estate to drink toddy. So Tuesday was selected to offer resistance or *Satyagraha* to dissuade the coolies from drinking toddy. The *Satyagrahis* were acting on the instructions of Karwar Congress Committee. On the scheduled day seventy seven *Satyagrahis* led by Moorthy and accompanied by Ratna and Rangamma reached the site of the fair. A large crowd gathered and there was occasional shouting of "vande mataram" and "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai". As the protestors reached the gate of Skeffington Coffee Estate and their protest was about to start it began to rain. It was taken as a sign of the blessing of God. When they reached at the gate of the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the police was already there. The Foreman, (*Maistri*) led the coolies in a line towards the toddy booth. Moorthy ordered his followers to sit in front of the entrance of the toddy booth preventing anybody from entering the booth. The rain became heavier and more vigorous. With heavy rain came the blows of police lathis. They started beating the *Satyagrahis* mercilessly. Many women *Satyagrahis* fell unconscious from the beating of the police. The unconscious bodies of the *Satyagrahis* were loaded in trucks and carried away. When they gained consciousness they found themselves lying in the trucks. Out of the seventy seven now they remained only sixty seven. The ten out of them have been arrested. But they did not arrest Moorthy. He was still with the *Satyagrahis*. The next day it was found that the pariah street has some new faces. They were the coolies who came out from the Skeffington Coffee Estate and joined the Kanthapura pariahs. The success of the *Satyagraha* at the Boranna Toddy Booth encouraged many neighbouring villages and they too launched similar protest marches to close down toddy booths. Altogether twenty six toddy booths were closed down around Kanthapura. The fame of Moorthy as a leader of the masses spread around region.

The arrested *Satyagrahis* from the Baronna's Toddy Booth were released after their due term in the prison. They were given a hero's welcome on the day of their release. They narrated their stories of police brutalities in the custody. Seetharamu, one of the arrested *Satyagrahis*, was yoked

to a plough like an ox and forced to plough the field while in prison. He was whipped like a bull and made to work even when he ran high temperatures. The government started to take repressive measures against all the people of Kanthapura not only the freedom fighters. A new Patel or revenue collector was appointed and people were ordered to pay their taxes to him. Moorthy told the villagers that the British government would now be more oppressive and may even try to take away their property. But people must not be afraid of the government as they stand for the truth. Most of the people buried their gold and jewelry underground. In a very few days the government's repressive actions have started. One morning the people of Kanthapura discovered that all the roads leading to their village were blocked with stones and planks of trees. The canal banks have been dug and a posse of policemen led by a white man stood there with their guns. In the afternoon it was announced that if the people of Kanthapura did not pay their taxes as per the law each of them will have to pay a punitive tax of one rupee and three pice. Moorthy, Rangamma and Ratna visited people moving from house to house and assured them of their help. They told that the fight has begun and they have to remain firm in their fight. If the police entered their house they should ring the temple bell so that volunteers could come to their assistance. The atmosphere in Kanthapura remained very tense all through the night. The next morning police took out the coolies who had deserted the Skeffington Coffee Estate. They were rounded up and marched back to the estate. Rangamma's house was locked up and nobody was allowed to enter. Moorthy and Rangamma were arrested in the middle of the night. Many men were arrested and their women were tied and gagged. Whole of Kanthapura was turned into a police barrack. Everywhere there are only policemen. The pariah women and their children pelted stones at the policemen. The policemen chased them. A policeman caught hold of a pariah boy and beat him up mercilessly; women were brutalized too. A pariah women Puttamma was mercilessly beaten by a policeman. Seethamma rushed to help her neighbour and found a lot of policemen she ran away from that place and hid herself in the temple. The policemen had brought an elephant to break open the doors of Rangamma's house. The pariah women set on fire Bhatta's house.

The womenfolk hid themselves inside the temple and locked it. One of the women, Vedamma was suffering from high fever and she needed something to cover her body as she was shivering in cold. Ratna thought of bringing a rug or a quilt for her. She came out of the temple and immediately was seen by a policeman. The policeman chased her upto the temple door. Ratna came in and locked the temple door by putting the bar across the door. So that no one can break it open. The

police tried to break open the temple door and when they failed to break it open they sealed it from outside putting these women as prisoners inside the temple. The womenfolk inside the temple were all hungry and thirsty so they started singing bhajans after lighting the sacred fire. They thought that someone from outside may come to their rescue. Next morning Rachanna's wife Rachi appeared on the temple door and opened it by bringing the key from the Patel's house. The imprisoned womenfolk hurried back to their houses. Whole of Kanthapure appeared deserted after the police had withdrawn. There are some men who were not taken by the police came out from there hiding places in dense jungles and bushes.

After three days of the police repression in Kanthapura came a bigger danger. A cavalcade of vehicles reached Kanthapura. In some of these vehicles there were white men and in some others there were coolies. Soon the announcers beating their drums announced that those who have not paid their taxes to the government their lands will be auctioned. This sent shivers down the spine of many villagers of Kanthapura. They understood the seriousness of this announcement and the determination of the government in punishing the rebels. One of the women Satamma was so nervous after hearing the announcement that she started regretting her association with Moorthy and the Mahatma. Other women tried to pacify her. They went to Ratna's house to consult her in this hour of crisis. Ratna was living in Sami's house as her house was sealed by the government. Ratna assured the frightened women of Kanthapura that there is nothing to worry as hundreds of volunteers are coming to Kanthapura from the city to help the people here and the government cannot do anything to them. To support her point she said that one of the volunteers from the city has already arrived here and the volunteers will resist any attempt by the government to auction their land. The volunteer assured the womenfolk that the government cannot do anything to them as Gandhi and the Congress are very strong. There will be equal number of volunteers to match the number of police and soldiers when they come to Kanthapura. The volunteers will come to Kanthapura for a *Satyanarayana puja* and remain here to fight for the people. He gave the example of the freedom struggle going on in a far northern city of Peshawar. In Peshawar the Muslims of the city have successfully liberated the city from the Whitemen. They had adopted *Satyagraha* as their means of struggle and went ahead with bare chests in front of the cannons and many were shot dead yet the march continued till they conquered the city. It was decided that there would be a *satyanarayana puja* and a procession will follow with the idols of Gods and Goddesses and under the cover of this procession they will go out of Kanthapura. As the preparation for the procession

are made news came of more busloads of people are arriving for the auctions. As evening descended gas lights were lit and the coolies brought from the city were told to cut the paddy grown in the field of the people of Kanthapura.

The Gandhians all around the city has thronged Kanthapura to support the people who are at the edge of a decisive fight. Advocate Sankar also joins the fight. One of the protestors hoists the national flag. The police led by an English officer began firing at them. One of the protestors shouts not too fire at them as they are non-violent. The officer stops firing and asks them if they are loyal to the British government. The protestors reply that they are loyal to only one government and that is the government of the Mahatma. The officer orders the soldiers to resume fire at the protestors. The soldiers under the orders of the English officer slaughter the protestors. Womenfolk hide themselves in the sugarcane plantation. The slaughtering of the innocent non-violent people was so brutal that Rachi, the wife of Rachanna could no longer tolerate it and decided to burn down the village. She and many other pariah women took off their clothes and made a bonfire of them and then set one hut after another on fire. The soldiers started chasing them and they ran towards the Maddur mountains. After about an hour's walking they reached the Maddur village the people there gave them food and drinks. They cannot rest there as the police was after them They crossed the river Cauvery and reached the state of Mysore. They reached the village of Kashipur and decided to settle there.

Almost one year and two months have passed since that fateful night the thirty refugees crossed over to Kashipur and settled there down. Most of their comrades are still in jail. Ratna got a one year prison term and was the first to be released. Ratna gave the information that Gandhiji has come to terms with the Viceroy and has suspended the freedom struggle. As a result of Gandhiji's pact with the Viceroy Moorthy also gets released from the jail. He has written a letter to Ratna in which he has narrated how profoundly he has been influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru. Moorthy gives up on Gandhi for his soft policy towards the British and gets attracted to Nehru whom he describes as the Bharat in *Ramayana*. Ratna left for Bombay and Moorthy remained a Congressman supporting Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of equal distribution of wealth in the society. Rangamma still remained in jail, and the only person who has returned to Kanthapura is Rangè Gowda. According to Achakka's account the village Kanthapura was sold away to city-people from Bombay. The news spreads that Gandhi has visited England, the red-man's country and people believed that he will succeed in bringing *swaraj* to India. With this positive thought the novel ends.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-III

1. Give a brief description of Skeffington Coffee Estate.
2. Who are the prominent women characters of the novel?
3. Describe in your own words the picketing at the toddy booth.

8.5 CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL

8.5.1 MYTH AS A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Myth is an inseparable part from culture in India. Every village every hamlet and locality in India is invariably associated with a local legend of some god or goddesses or godlike figure. Raja Rao uses myth as a narrative technique in *Kanthapura*. The plot of the story is set in an imaginary village Kanthapura. The narrative technique he adopts is that of the *sthala purana*. The narrator is an old grandmotherly lady Achakka. Like *Ramayana* is narrated by the Sage Valmiki similarly *Kanthapura* is narrated in a non-episodic manner by the old lady.

Critic K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar while commenting on *Kanthapura* writes that “The theme of Kanthapura may be summed up as ‘Gandhi and our Village’, but the style of narration makes the book more a *Gandhi Purana* than a piece of mere fiction.” (391). In the Foreword to the novel Raja Rao writes:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthala purana* or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village--- Rama might have rested under this pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. (Foreword to *Kanthapura*)

Myth is introduced in the novel at two distinct levels— in style of narration and in the content. The story is told in by a grandmother who tells the history of her imaginary village in a grandmotherly story-telling style. Her story-telling is feminine, spontaneous, and typically racy

like the legendary Indian mythological tales. Raja Rao mentions in the *Foreword* to the novel that Indians think quickly and their story-telling style is interminable, episodes follow episodes in rapid succession without any pause. So the grandmother Achakka in a very racy style narrates the story of *Kanthapura*. The story is told in a breathlessly racy style from the beginning to the end and told in the Indian traditional style of story-telling with episodes following episodes and with innumerable digressions. Raja Rao adopts the style of oral traditions in telling the story of *Kanthapura*. The narrative of the novel like in an oral tradition includes prayers, songs, proverbs, mythologies, and epics. *Kanthapura* is unique because it has brought in a sense of freedom from imitating the English style of writing to Indian writers of novel.

Myth is introduced in the content of the narration very early in the novel. Achakka begins the story by narrating about the local deity Kenchamma who has once saved the people of Kanthapura from the attack of a demon who spread violence in the village. Kenchamma came from the heaven and fought with the demon and defeated him. In the ensuing bloodshed one side of the mountain of Kanthapura became red with the blood of the demon. After killing the demon goddess Kenchamma started living with the common people of Kanthapura and solved their problems. So the villagers had a strong faith in goddess Kenchamma and they go to her praying whenever they face any problem.

The freedom struggle is also presented as a battle between the *Devas*, the forces of good; and *asuras*, the forces of evil. So Kanthapura remains a combination of *puranic* and folk elements as a narrative technique. The mythical story of goddess Kenchamma's divine appearance to save Kanthapura from the demon has been given a touch of reality by associating it to the red hills of Kanthapura. This type of linking is what Raja Rao terms as *sthala purana* where a *purana* is mixed with the local symbol to bring about an association of the past myth with that of the present reality. Past is beautifully blended with the present. The *puranas* stress on the *avatars* and their appearance to wipe out the evil has been effectively used in the narrative by Raja Rao by elevating his characters to a mythical level.

The freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi is not merely a political one aiming at setting India free from the colonial British rule. It was also a social movement with the objective of bringing about reformation in the traditional Indian society. Gandhi aimed at reforming the Indian

society of its age old maladies like caste system and untouchability. Moorthy introduces Gandhi to the people of Kanthapura through Jayaramachar's *Harikatha* where Gandhi is compared with Rama of the *Ramayana* and Nehru with Bharata. Gandhi has been raised to the pedestal of a mythical figure in the novel. He remains invisible but his ideals are all pervasive. Visible Moorthy is the *avatar* of the invisible God Gandhi.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-IV

1. Which mythical figure Gandhi has been compared with in the novel?
2. How does Jayaramachar introduce Gandhi into his *Harikatha*?

8.5.2 CHARACTERS

MOORTHY

Moorthy is the central character or the chief protagonist of the novel. He is a young educated Brahmin boy of Kanthapura. He is presented, in the narration of Achakka, as an ordinary young man without anything heroic about him. He is a staunch supporter of Gandhi and his ideals. He is chiefly responsible for bringing in the Gandhian ideals to the village OF Kanthapura. He visits from home to home spreading the message of Gandhi like boycotting foreign clothes and spinning one's own yarn and becoming self reliant, fight against untouchability and bringing in social equality and becoming truthful. The impact of Gandhian ideals converts him into a revolutionary leader from an ordinary village boy. He fights for social equality and to free his village from the domination of the foreign British rule. He forms the local Congress Committee to organize the poor, illiterate, and ignorant villagers of Kanthapura. It is he who inspires them to fight against the British government through Gandhian non-violent means. He takes up the cause of the poor coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate and inspires them to fight against the evil practice of drinking toddy. He achieves a degree of success in reforming the society adopting the non-violent means of *Satyagraha*, even in the face of government repression. He proves that he is a dedicated leader who is not afraid to sacrifice his personal comfort and is even prepared to face the worst while working for the masses. In his struggle against the social maladies like untouchability and

dependence on foreign goods, he has to pay a price. The first sacrifice he has to give is that his own mother does not support him in his mission to reform the society. When the Swami of the city declares his excommunication, his mother Narsamma dies of shock. Moorthy becomes a symbol of modern, progressive, and spiritual leader, a messiah of the pariahs, a symbol of new life in Kanthapura. He wants to spread the message of Gandhi.

He tries to bring about social reformation by treating the Pariahs or untouchables equally. So when he was trying to organize the people to establish a Congress Committee in Kanthapura he not only approaches the upper caste people but also visits the Pariah quarters and also accepts drinks in their house, a forbidden task for him as a Brahmin. Being a Brahmin boy accepting a drink in a Pariah home is unacceptable by his religious standards. He organizes the people of Kanthapura to picket against the Toddy Booth so that people can be made aware of the ill effects of drinking toddy. Inspired by him the poor and powerless people of Kanthapura take up a fight against the might of the government. Bade Khan and the Foreman, representatives of the powerful ruling class, are beaten up. But violence is not the means to achieve his goal. Immediately after this violent incident Moorthy sits on fast for three days to purify himself. Later he was arrested and put in jail for a long term.

When he gives a call for the “Don’t touch the government campaign” the people of Kanthapura extend whole hearted support to him. By this time he has established himself as an unchallenged leader of the masses. Coinciding with Gandhi’s Dandi March to break the unjustified British tax on salt, Kanthapura too prepares to fight against the oppressive government. But the government this time becomes more ruthless and forces the poor villagers to flee. They had to leave their home and hearth and settle in Kashipur in the state of Mysore. Although they are defeated but in their physical defeat they have plucked out a moral victory.

Gandhi has exhorted the Indians to respect women and give them their due position in the society. He has understood that it is the women who are pivotal to the well being of the family in particular and society at large. The novel is called a *Gandhi Purana* and hence Moorthy is a miniature representative of Gandhi and Kanthapura a microcosm of India. Like Gandhi Moorthy too realizes the importance of women in the society. He gives more importance to the women like Ratna, Rangamma, and other Pariah women in taking his struggle forward against the mighty, colonial, foreign rule.

However, the novelist is careful not to portray Moorthy as a superhuman character immune to human failings. He has presented him as a very human character grounded in his realities. One example of his human failing is that when he visits the Pariah quarters to convince the people to join in the Congress he encounters the dilemma of his high caste upbringing. On account of his being a Brahmin it is forbidden for him to accept anything from an untouchable, on the other hand he has taken up the task of spreading the Gandhian ideals among the people, eradicating untouchability is one of them. He is offered a glass of milk by Rachanna's wife Racha. He cannot accept any food or drink in a Pariah house as per the religious demands of his caste. But he accepts the glass of milk with hesitation. On returning home the first thing he does is to take a bath and change his clothes to purify himself from the pollution he has infected by accepting the drink from a Pariah woman. The human fallibility in Moorthy gets exposed so far camouflaged under the façade of a revolutionary zeal.

Moorthy, like Gandhi, has understood the importance of religion in inspiring the masses. It is his discovery of the *Shiva Linga* which starts a cycle of religious activities in Kanthapura. He invites the *Harikatha* man Jayaramachar who subtly mixes up Gandhi in his religious discourses and presents Gandhi as force of *Devas* who is fighting the *Asuras* in the form of the British colonial government. He begins his social reformation mission and struggle against the government with a *Puja* and a *Bhajan* session. As a shrewd political leader he deftly uses religion as a tool for mobilizing the masses. When after the final encounter with the government forces people are forced to flee Kanthapura, Moorthy gives up on Gandhi and his ideals. He feels that Gandhi is too soft on the British in his approach. He finds Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of equal distribution of wealth a better political ideology than Gandhi's. He switches sides.

Moorthy as the central figure of the novel is no superhuman; he is very much an ordinary young man with all human failings. However, he is a village youth inspired by Gandhi's idealism and takes a plunge into the freedom struggle of India like many other Indians did at that time. If the village of Kanthapura is the microcosm of India, then Moorthy is its Gandhi.

RATNA

Ratna is the daughter of Kamamma who was married at the age of ten and soon after her husband dies and she becomes a widow. When the actions of the novel begin she is a girl of fifteen. As per

the traditions of that time her mother severs all links with her and villagers treat her as an untouchable. She supports Moorthy's resistance movement whole heartedly and remains a vital part of the movement till the end. After the death of Ramakrishnayya Ratna takes up the centre stage of the Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. It is she who now reads out the religious scriptures to be interpreted by Rangamma. Ratna is representative of the victim womanhood of traditional Hindu society where a young woman is ostracized just for no fault of her own. Ratna, by her actions in joining the resistance movement also exhibits that Gandhism, to some extent, has succeeded in empowering the women of India.

Ratna becomes a part of the movement initiated by Moorthy and remains faithful to it. She takes care of Moorthy when he sits on a three day fast. She is a very courageous woman who defies the age old practices of the society against the widows. She wears colourful dress which is not allowed to the widows. She wears a *Bindi* on her forehead again forbidden for the widows. She goes alone to the river bank to wash her clothes and returns alone too. She wants to live the life of normal girl defying the norms of the society. She is a brave girl who takes up the mantle of the Gandhian movement in Kanthapura after the arrest of Moorthy. During the "Don't touch the government campaign" she leads the masses. She takes a lead role in the *Satyanarayana Puja* procession which later turns out to be a Congress Party procession. She was even close to be raped by a policeman but she fights bravely and runs into the temple to save her honour. She questions the established norm of patriarchy in the Hindu society by leading the life of a normal girl. In the beginning of the novel Ratna is presented as an arrogant and careless woman but as she joins Moorthy in the freedom struggle she gets transformed into a responsible leader of the masses.

The novelist does not make any attempt to develop a romantic relationship between Ratna and Moorthy which would have given a new dimension to the novel. .

RANGAMMA

Rangamma is the most important woman character in the novel *Kanthapura*. She is a rich widow and daughter of learned Ramkrishnayya. Her younger brothers lived in Bombay hence her brothers are city bred. She has no children of her own so she loves Moorthy and after the death of Moorthy's mother Narsamma he moves into Rangamma's house to live. Rangamma is one of the few literate women in Kanthapura so she takes up the leadership of women volunteers of the congress during

the absence of Moorthy. Rangamma helps and supports Moorthy in organizing the women of the village. Recognizing her active contribution to the Congress she gets elected to the Congress committee in Kanthapura. She is one of the strongest woman characters of the novel. She is a literate woman a rare thing in the rural India at that time. She helps Moorthy in organizing the Congress Committee in Kanthapura. She organizes the women of Kanthapura to support the reforms Moorthy wants to bring into the society. During the absence of Moorthy she carries on the Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. She is quite hostile to hypocrite Bhatta. When Moorthy organizes the Congress Committee Rangamma is considered to become the first women member of it. She takes the role of the member of the Congress Committee very seriously. After the death of Ramakrishnayya, her father, she takes up the holy task of explaining the *Vedas* to the simple village folks. Ratna reads out the texts and Rangamma explains them to the villagers. This practice of two women interpreting the Hindu ancient scriptures is quite unconventional because traditionally it is never considered a women's job. By doing so Rangamma attempts to reform the society from within. Secondly, she emphatically asserts, through her actions, that women can also do those very things considered unfit for them by men. She asserts the dignity of women in the patriarchal society.

BHATTA

Bhatta is depicted as a shrewd and hypocritical Brahmin money lender of Kanthapura. The characters of *Kanthapura* are clearly divided into two broad categories—good and evil. *Devos*, the *Satyagrahis* and their supporters, are good characters; and the *Asuras*, the stooges of the imperial British government who in every step work to sabotage the freedom movement of the masses are the evil characters. Bhatta clearly falls under the category of evil characters because of his antagonism to Moorthy and his supporters. To elucidate the evil nature of Bhatta the novelist presents his murky background too. He appeared in Kanthapura as poor Brahmin in loin cloth and a copper pot in his hand. He acted as the village priest and slowly turned into a money lender or usurer. He shrewdly attracted the poor farmers into his debt-trap and took over their land. He amassed a huge wealth by this evil means exploiting the poor and ignorant farmers of Kanthapura. The novelist is very careful in representing the Brahmin community in the novel. He portrays three main Brahmin characters of different levels and attitudes. They are elderly Ramakrishnayya, Moorthy and Bhatta. When Ramakrishnayya and Moorthy belong to the learned and dedicated

class of Brahmins respectively, Bhatta falls under the category of crafty, greedy, and hypocritical Brahmin, an epitome of evil.

Bhatta's hypocrisy is exposed in the novel in the graphic account of his visits that he pays to people's houses for the purpose of obsequies or rituals observed after death. He never shows any concern for the spiritual aspect of the ritual rather he is more worried about the sumptuous meal that is offered to him. He eats for a very long time relishing the food items given to him never bothering about the other guests who wait for their turn after he finishes. He is so selfish that he never thinks of his wife who remains at home. When he had grand meals at the houses of his clients, his wife managed only with simple dal and rice. After the death of his wife to whom he was utterly apathetic, he married an underage girl. His degeneration as a Brahmin becomes complete when he marries an underage girl, accepts dowry, before his wife's obsequies are over. He is a crafty and derived sadistic pleasure in other persons suffering. He is always antagonistic towards Moorthy and his group of *Satyagrahis*. In order to bring Waterfall Venkamma to his side he arranges the marriage of her daughter with advocate Seenappa who was an aged widower with children. When the villagers organize a reception meeting to welcome Moorthy on his return from jail, Bhatta tries to sabotage it. He consults Waterfall Venkamma and schedules her daughter's marriage ceremony on the same day so that people of Kanthapura would be attracted to the feast and do not attend the reception meeting of Moorthy. This is how his viciously crafty mind works.

In an attempt to exploit the supporters of Moorthy and the Congress Party he charges high rate of interest on them. He has amassed his huge landed property by dealing fraudulently with the poor and illiterate farmers. He is a degenerated and degraded Brahmin who lived off the misery of others in his own village. Bhatta is a symbol of polluted Brahminism. Through Bhatta's character Raja Rao shows his concern at the hypocritical nature of Brahminism. Bhatta's ultimate departure to Kashi at the end of the novel raises the concern of a bigger threat to Hinduism at large.

8.5.3 THEMES

GANDHIAN DOCTRINES

Kanthapura is otherwise termed as a *Gandhi Purana*. It is written in the historical backdrop of India's freedom struggle in the early 1930s. What was happening in the village of Kanthapura was happening all over India. Gandhi's message has spread to every nook and corner of India and the ordinary masses were inspired them profoundly in a nationalist fervor. Raja Rao, the novelist,

depicts the deep impact of Gandhian doctrines on the common people of India throughout the novel. The three basic doctrines of Gandhi are -- Non-violence, home spun cloth, and eradication of untouchability. In the novel Moorthy, the chief protagonist, takes up the task of spreading Gandhian doctrines among the villagers of Kanthapura as the mission of his life. He invites the *Harikatha* man Jayaramachar, who presents Gandhi as a divine incarnation instills a sense of awe among the villagers about Gandhi. He in his *Harikatha* presents Gandhi as an *Avatar* of God who has appeared to free India from the *Asuras*, the colonial British government and its supporters. After Gandhi is introduced to the villagers as a God Moorthy gradually introduces them to his doctrines. To imbibe a sense of self-reliance he teaches them to spin their own yarn. He distributes the spinning wheels among the villagers for free after he forms the Kanthapura Congress Committee and the villagers take to spinning yarn as fish to water. Moorthy initiates the villagers to imbibe the second level of Gandhian ideal that is non-violence. When he organizes the villagers and the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate to picket against the toddy booth, he strictly advises them to remain non-violent even in the face of extreme provocation. Despite his advice violence erupts and the Coffee estate Foreman and Bade Khan, the police officer, are beaten up. Moorthy accepts moral responsibility for the violence during the course of picketing and purifies himself, like Gandhi, by fasting for three days. The most difficult stage of inculcating Gandhian ideals among the villagers of Kanthapura is making them aware of the ill-effects of untouchability. Caste is a deeply entrenched system in the Hindu society. It is not easy to eradicate this inhuman system practiced from generation to generation. Moorthy, despite being a staunch disciple of Gandhi, is not free from this system. As a Brahmin he too is deeply embedded in this cultural system. Caste system has a deep impact on the individuality of Moorthy. So when he visits the Pariah quarters in order to persuade them to join the Congress he too is hesitant to enter their homes and accept food and drink from them. He does accept a glass of milk from Rachanna's wife Racha but after reaching home he goes through the usual purification practices like taking a bath, changing clothes, and drinking *Gangajal*. This act of Moorthy speaks volumes of his own attitude towards the Pariahs or untouchables in the initial stage of his political career. Even he is not prepared to treat the Pariahs as equal human beings in the initial stage of his political career. However, as he matures as a leader of the masses he successfully sheds his prejudices against the Pariahs and organizes them against the British colonial rule. So it is rightly said that the village of Kanthapura is a miniature geographical representation of India and Moorthy is its Gandhi. The novel contains in it

several layers of conflicts. One of the most pronounced one is the conflict between modernity and conservatism. Gandhi, at a national level, and Moorthy in the local level strive to bring in the modern liberal values like equality to their respective constituencies. By taking up the Gandhian concept of equality Moorthy faces the wrath of the conservatives like Bhatta, the Swami, and Waterfall Venkamma. The threat of excommunication constantly hangs over his head like a Damocles' sword. He loses his mother to this threat of excommunication. However, Moorthy succeeds in converting the villagers into believing that Gandhism will bring in an era of progress and equality. By the end of the novel Gandhi emerges as the alternate God to the traditionally existing ones. Moorthy successfully makes the masses believe that their most potent enemy is the colonial foreign rule and they can successfully defeat these imperial forces only by fighting unitedly overcoming caste prejudices. The burning down of the village at the end of the novel is a symbolic message of the rejection of caste based society.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a political novel with a strong political message. Gandhi, though invisible, forms the central figure of the novel and the entire action of the novel revolves around Gandhi. But Raja Rao in a very subtle manner mingles religion with politics in the novel. Gandhi is not presented in the novel merely as a political leader; he emerges as a God in the *Harikatha* of Jyaramachar. The Hindu mythology is replete with the stories of God appearing taking different incarnations to save the world from evil. God appears in an incarnation of a saviour when righteousness in the world gets threatened and evil dominates. The God in an incarnation of the saviour fights the forces of evil and re-establishes righteousness in the world. In the novel Moorthy very profoundly gets influenced by idealism of Gandhi and wants to spread them among the ignorant villagers. Moorthy realizes that spreading the message of Gandhi among the illiterate villagers will be an uphill task. So he takes the help of religion as he realizes that religion is the key to enter into the lives of the villagers. The discovery of the half-buried *Shiva Linga* provides him with that opportunity. He organizes a *Harikatha* by inviting Jayaramachar from the city. Jayaramachar in his *Harikatha* narrates the tale of *Puranas* and *Avatars*. He presents the character of Gandhi as an *Avatar* of God who has appeared to free India from the evil clutches of the imperial British government. He is compared to Lord Krishna and Rama. Gandhi's going to England has been presented as the mythical tale of Rama's exile to forest. Jawaharlal Nehru has been portrayed

as Bharata, the brother of Rama who remained as a caretaker ruler of Ayodhya during the absence of his elder brother Rama. Sita's kidnapping by Ravana is the British rule over India and Rama's fight against Ravana to rescue Sita is equal to Gandhi's struggle for India's freedom from the colonial rule. Goddess Kenchamma is another manifestation of religion in the narrative. The village of Kanthapura was protected by the Goddess from a demon in the past and she still remains the protector of the village. Gandhi's struggle against the British is manifested in the novel as a fight between the forces of good versus the forces of evil; between the *Davas* and the *Asuras*. The *Devas* are represented by the *Satyagrahis* and their supporters and the *Asuras* are the agents of the British rule such as the Foreman of Skeffington Coffee Estate, Bade Khan, the police officer, Swami, the god man of the city, Bhatta and such others. The portrayal of the character of Bade Khan, a lathi wielding police officer is depicted as a soldier of the ten headed demon king Ravana, the British government. Bade Khan is a non-Hindu, an agent of the British and antagonistic to the struggle of the villagers reinforces the idea of religion as the driving force behind the struggle of the villagers of Kanthapura. Bade Khan's Muslim identity is underlined boldly as an agent of the British rule and as an extension of the tyranny and repression of the British government. In the depiction of good and evil Bade Khan has been portrayed as evil who is intensely hostile to Moorthy's freedom struggle and his supporter. Moorthy spreads the doctrines of Gandhi among the villagers of Kanthapura through a heavy dose of religion.

CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Critic C.D. Narsimhaiah expressing his views on the novel *Kanthapura* says that:

There are at least three strands of experience in the novel: the political, the religious, and the social, and all the three are woven inextricably into the one complex story of Kanthapura. (Introduction to *Kanthapura*)

Kanthapura highlights the prevailing conservatism in Indian society in the early 1930s. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is written in the backdrop of India's freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. As a book depicting the freedom struggle automatically makes it a political novel. But Gandhi's freedom movement was not solely aimed at putting an end to the British rule; it was a movement to bring about social reformation in the Indian society. Gandhi's main objective was to bring about equality in the Indian society eradicating age old caste hierarchy. Casteism divided the Indian

society on the lines of caste and to destroy this caste system was not easy as it was entrenched in the Indian psyche too deeply to be removed. Moorthy, the Gandhi of Kanthapura, initiates measures to imbibe the Gandhian ideals among the villagers. However, reforming a traditional society of its maladies like untouchability proves to be herculean task for Moorthy. He encounters staunch opposition from conservative forces represented by Bhatta, the Brahmin, Waterfall Venkamma, Swami and many such others. The traditional village of Kanthapura has been divided into many parts on caste lines. There are the weavers' colony, potters' colony, and the pariah colony. This strict division of habitation on the caste lines has divided the society and its people. The group consisting of the agents of the ruling dispensation was benefitting from such a fragmented society. Thus these antagonistic forces like Bhatta opposed any attempt to reform the society. The people like Bhatta and the Swami benefitted from this system being the Brahmins and they served their political masters by exploiting the religious belief of the simple and ignorant villagers. Gandhi's struggle for freedom not only aimed at achieving freedom for Indians from the colonial British rule but also at reforming the society by bringing in an element of equality. This modern idea of equality encounters severe opposition from conservative quarters. Moorthy faces the constant threat of excommunication. Even his own mother Narsamma severs all links with him for visiting pariah quarters and getting polluted from the Swami. The narrator Achakka at the initial stage of the freedom struggle hesitates to join along with the pariahs. Moorthy too was not very straightforward in his approach to the concept of social equality. At the beginning he too is very hesitant to shed his cultural inhibition of caste consciousness being a Brahmin himself. When he is invited by Racha, a pariah woman, to come inside her home, he hesitates and also is reluctant to accept a glass of milk. He takes a sip when insisted but soon after reaching home takes a bath, changes his clothes and drinks *Gangajal* to purify himself from the pollution he has infected supposedly by visiting a pariah home. This episode shows how deeply the sense of caste has been embossed in the social consciousness of Moorthy and how difficult it is to discard that from his consciousness. Yet he overcomes his initial inhibitions and organizes all the people of Kanthapura irrespective of caste, class, and gender to fight against the social inequality on one hand and on the other colonial forces of the British government.

Gandhi's freedom movement is aimed at bringing about changes in three fields of the society—first to bring about equality by eradicating the inhuman caste system and untouchability, second,

to make Indians self-reliant by making them spin their own yarn and rid themselves of the dependence on foreign clothes, and third, to give due position to women in the Indian society. Moorthy becomes the face of fight against untouchability and caste system. He spearheads the fight against exploitation and untouchability. The face of self reliance is Advocate Sankar who not only wears *kahdi* but also insists other to follow suit. The portrayal of the character of Ratna highlights the progressive character of a widow who defies the traditional restrictions imposed on her and leads a life of defiance against conservative forces. She is representative of the modern progressive woman of Indian society. Apart from these three dominant changes the novel highlights, Moorthy fights against the economic exploitation of the coolies by the owner of the Skeffington Coffee Estate and drinking of toddy. The novelist focuses on the political and social changes brought about through the Gandhian movement. However, there are many strong adversaries resisting any change to take place. Gandhi's struggle against the British was political at one level and social at another. Gandhi wanted to eradicate the age old malady of caste system or untouchability prevailing in Indian society. It is so deeply entrenched in the Indian social system that even Moorthy finds it hard to get out of his cultural upbringing. The novelist highlights the struggle between the progressives who strive to change the society for better, inculcating among people the sense of equality and their adversaries, the conservative forces who remain stubborn to maintain the status quo ante in society. The novel has many strands of conflict apart from the clash between orthodoxy and progressive ideas; there is the struggle between planter and the coolies; the fight of the self respecting villager against the corrupt official. All these conflicts are relegated to the background when one dominant conflict takes over, that is, the fight against the colonial forces by the colonized.

COLONIAL EXPLOITATION

Raja Rao presents a graphic picture of the exploitation of the poor and the marginalized by the imperial British government and their agents in India. Skeffington Coffee Estate is depicted as the centre of exploitation in *Kanthapura*. Skeffington Coffee Estate is the symbol of the impact of industrialization imposed on a traditional society of Kanthapura. The Estate was owned by an Englishman is representative of the British supremacy over India. The owner of the Estate was called by the workers as 'hunter sahib' referring to the iron hand rule of the British in India. He punished workers even for slightest lapse in duty. He always moved around with a hunter in his

hand and whipped workers at will to make them work faster, a colonialist approach to maximize profit making. He was a cruel and tyrannical owner. He was a womanizer and used to sexually exploit the women workers of the Estate. He even has even murdered the father of a girl who has refused to send his daughter to him. The English courts have forgiven him for this heinous crime. This manifestation of the colonial forces scant respect for the life of the native. The coolies who worked in the estate are recruited from the plains below the ghats stretching up to river Godavary. These poor workers are lured by the *maistri* or the Foreman to work in the Estate by promising them less work, comfortable living conditions and high wages. But once they came to the Estate the behavior of the foreman changed and he would treat them very harshly. These poor labourers are made to work very hard in the Estate on very low wages. The workers lived in sub-human conditions, many died of diseases caused by unhygienic living, and many others died of snake bite. These workers are also forced to drink toddy from the Boranna Toddy Booth so that they can be kept in perennial poverty. Moorthy and his supporters picket before this toddy booth to dissuade the workers from drinking toddy which leads to an eruption of violence between the workers on one side and Bade Khan and the Foreman on the other.

The British government innovated newer means to exploit the Indians by levying unjustified taxes. Salt Tax is one such tax. Gandhiji protested against this tax and marched to Dandi sea-shore to make salt in defiance of the British salt law. Coinciding with Gandhi's Dandi March the people of Kanthapura inspired by Moorthy and the Congress Committee of Karwar launches the 'Don't touch the government campaign'. The people of Kanthapura decide to lead a civil disobedience movement by refusing to pay any tax to the colonial British government. Police repression follows and the non-violent agitation of the masses and the innocent people suffer a lot at the hands of the colonial police force. The people including women are subjected to inhuman police brutalities. Ratna even narrowly escapes being getting raped by a police man. The village of Kanthapura is burned down and the people are forced to migrate to Kshipur where they settle down.

8.6 SUMMING UP

You have studied this unit on the novel *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, one of the foremost novelists of Indian English writing of the early twentieth century. The novel is written in the backdrop of the freedom struggle of India led by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi remains an invisible character in the novel but an identical figure or an idealistic manifestation of Gandhi in the form of Moorthy leads the freedom struggle in Kanthapura, an obscure village in South India. Kanthapura, the village, is

presented as a microcosm of India, that is, it is a mini-India, and what is happening in the rest of India finds a reflection in this village. Gandhi's freedom movement was not only political in nature; it also aimed at reforming the society of some of its orthodoxy like untouchability and position of women in traditional Indian society. Moorthy strives to reform the community life of Kanthapura by initiating reforms. He tries to convince the people to be united against the colonial forces and their agents by treating everyone as equal irrespective of one's caste, class, and gender. He strives to better the condition of the coolies, tries to dissuade them from drinking toddy. He mobilizes the masses of Kanthapura to such an extent that in the final battle against the colonial forces the villagers fight to the end without giving up. Finally they had to leave their home and hearth and migrate to Kashipur leaving behind Kanthapura.

The narrative style Raja Rao adopts to tell the story of *Kanthapura* is the style of *sthala purana*. The style of story telling that is racy with a lot of digressions like a grandmother's way of telling a story. He highlights the deeply rooted orthodoxy entrenched in the Indian society and the need to reform. The novelist also highlights the difficulty the forces of reform face from the forces representing conservatism. The novel also highlights the colonial exploitation of the poor and the marginalized Indians by the colonial forces and their agents. Hope you have gone through the contents of this unit carefully, answer the Check Your Progress exercises, and try to answer the terminal questions given at the end to test your comprehension. Hope you have enjoyed reading this unit.

8.7 GLOSSARY

Red-men: The British or the European; Pariah: Member of the low caste or untouchable community; Asura: demon, forces of evil; Devas: Gods or forces of good; Maistri: Head of a group of workmen; Khadi: Home spun coarse cloth; Harikatha: Legendary tales of gods;

8.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Why is the *Foreword* to the novel *Kanthapura* considered to be a significant critical document?
2. The village of Kanthapura is a microcosm of modern India. Discuss.
3. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a *Gandhi Purana*. How do you justify this statement? Substantiate your answer with reasoned arguments.
4. *Kanthapura* is a portrait gallery of rural India. Elucidate.
5. Write a note on the depiction of women characters in *Kanthapura*.

6. Discuss *Kanthapura* as a novel of Indian sensibility.
7. Discuss *Kanthapura* as a novel on the Freedom Struggle of India.
8. Write a note on the narrative technique of the novel *Kanthapura*.
9. Discuss the theme of colonial exploitation as presented in the novel.
10. Present note on the character of Moorthy.
11. *Knathapura* is a novel on the perennial conflict between modernity and orthodoxy. Discuss.
12. *Kanthapura* is the microcosm of India and Moorthy is a miniature representation of Gandhi. Substantiate the statement from your reading of *Kanthapura*.

8.9 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 9: UNTOUCHABLE : SOCIAL CONCERNS IN INDIAN NOVEL

9.0 Learning Objectives

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Critical aspects of the novel

9.3 Preface to *Untouchable* by E. M. Forster

9.4 *Untouchable* Synopsis

9.4.1 Bakha, the Sweeper, starts his day

9.4.2 Bakha returns home after his morning shift duty

9.4.3. Bakha expelled from his home

9.5 Themes

9.5.1 The Practice of Untouchability

9.5.2 Alienation

9.5.3 Attitude of High Caste people to the untouchables

9.5.4 Inter-caste relations

9.5.5 Social Realism: Religion and Caste Discrimination

9.6 Characters

9.7 Narrative Style and Technique

9.8 Summing Up

9.9 Assessment Questions

9.10 References and Further Reading

9.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This Unit deals with Mulk Raj Anand's first and most controversial novel

Untouchable published in 1935. After going through this Unit *you* will be able to:

- Familiarize yourself with the life and literary career of Mulk Raj Anand
- Form an idea about the period in the backdrop of which this novel was written
- Understand the plot and action of the novel
- Acquaint yourself with the theme and characters of the novel
- Familiarize yourself with the narrative technique and style of the novel
- Understand Anand's art of characterization
- Form a critical opinion about the novel

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand has carved a niche for himself as a modern novelist in Indian Writing in English writing on a variety of subjects. Commenting on Anand's versatility critic K.R.S. Iyengar writes:

As a writer of fiction, Anand's notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality. He is a veritable Dickens for describing the inequities and idiosyncrasies in the current human situation with candour as well as accuracy.

(*Indian Writing in English*, P-356)

Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao are the three pillars of Indian English novel. Out of these three Mulk Raj Anand is the most prolific. He has about 70 short stories to his credit, 14 novels and thousands of letters in which he makes telling comments on his art and craft. He was awarded the Padma Bhusan in 1968 for his contribution to Indian English Writing. He was also conferred with the prestigious Sahitya Akademy Award in 1971 for his autobiographical novel *Morning Face*. In 1953 he was given the International Peace Prize for World Peace. He breathed his last on 28th September 2004 in Pune leaving behind his wife and a daughter.

Check Your Progress-I

1. What initiated Anand into a literary career?
2. Discuss in brief the periods of literary career of Mulk Raj Anand. (100 words)
3. What awards were conferred on Anand for his literary contributions?

9.2 CRITICAL ASPECT OF THE NOVEL

Caste system among the Hindus is a rigid hierarchy based on *Karma*. *Manusmriti* or *Manu Samhita* is widely regarded as the most authoritative book of Hindu laws and dates back to almost 2000 years. Caste system divides Hindus into four broad categories *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras*. The *Shudras* are engaged in cleaning toilets, cleaning drains and such other lowly jobs what the other sections of the society do not do. At the top of the caste column are the *Brahmins* who are believed to have come from Brahma's mouth and hence engaged in giving knowledge to the society. The second is the *Kshatriyas*, the warriors and the ruling class, believed to have come from the arms of Brahma. The third is *Vaishyas*, or the trading class who are supposed to have come from the thighs of Brahma. The fourth is the *Shudras* who came from the feet of the Brahma and are engaged in menial jobs. This system

bestowed undue privileges on the upper caste while repressing the low caste people in a very regressive manner. This system of caste continued unopposed for centuries in the Hindu society suppressing the outcastes, discriminating them and subjecting them to inhuman humiliations.

The decade of 1930 was the foundational period of a modern independent India. Many political events bear testimony to this: Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha Movement of 1930 and 1932, the three Round Table Conferences, the passing of the Government of India Act in 1935, the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, the Gandhian Movement of Harijan Uplift and Basic Education, and many such epoch making political events propelled India on the path of modernization. Traditional beliefs and adherences to blind ritualistic religion were questioned. Most pronounced among all the past practices was the caste system and the treatment of the outcastes by the upper caste Hindus. Many modern progressive political leaders now started to question and severely scrutinize this inhuman practice and were quite outspoken against it.

During this period Gandhi emerged as the unchallenged leader of the Indian masses. He was regarded not only as a political leader but also as a social reformer. The people of India looked forward to him to bring about progressive changes in to the stagnant Indian society. One of the notable things of emergence of Gandhi as a leader of the masses is that he inspired the youth of India to work for a better and more liberal society. Many reform movements initiated during the mid 19th century in India like the Brahmo Samaj (founded by Raja Rammohun Roy) and Arya Samaj (founded by Dayanand Saraswati) and these organizations strived to bring about social equality and fought for the rights of the untouchables who were totally marginalized by the upper caste Hindus. Congress under Gandhi incessantly worked for the uplift of the untouchables. The Indian novelists writing in English were deeply influenced by the major political happenings, social upheaval, and ideological churnings of the time. M. K. Naik in his chronicle of Indian writing in English terms this age as the age of "Gandhian Whirlwind". (*History of Indian English Literature*)

During the Freedom Struggle Mahatma Gandhi whole heartedly strived to bring about a unity among the different religious and caste groups of Indians. He found that

the Hindu society is fragmented because of the discriminatory practice of caste system where the low caste people are treated in most inhuman way denying them the basic rights of existence with dignity. He decided to eradicate this oppressive system and give the untouchables a life of dignity. Gandhi undertook the famous fast unto death in 1932 against the establishment of a separate electorate for the untouchables. Gandhi's genuine efforts brought in an element of awakening among the Indians against this brutal caste system.

When Mulk Raj Anand began his literary career as a novelist, he was very much in the thick of the political events that were beginning to change the Indian culture and society. He became very critical of the blind adherence to past traditions like caste system, its obscurantism and fossilization. Anand attempted to spread the vision of a society based on equality, mutual respect for each other and humanitarian compassion. Anand prepared the manuscript of this novel while he was in England in 1930. He came to India in 1932 and stayed in Sabarmati Ashram and showed the manuscript to Gandhi and carried out modifications on his advice and took the manuscript to publishers. Anand has mentioned that nineteen publishers turned it down. He was so depressed at these rejections of his manuscript that he seriously contemplated suicide. When E. M. Forster read the manuscript and wrote an introduction, it finally got published.

Mulk Raj Anand is the first novelist in Indian English to take up the subject of a low class sweeper. He keeps close to the ground reality and uses little imagination. He does not hesitate to throw light on one of the darkest spots of Hinduism and Indian way of life.

In *Untouchable* Mulk Raj Anand tells the poignant story of man's cruelty to another fellow human being. His story centres around the evils of caste system in Hinduism. The story of *Untouchable* is based on Anand's childhood memory of a low caste sweeper and his primary concern is the relation between the individual and the society. After the publication of *Untouchable* it was hailed as one of the most gripping yet controversial novels of the era. In no uncertain terms Anand unequivocally condemns

the hypocritical practice of untouchability and takes to task the upper caste Hindus for perpetuating such a system where one human being treats another so cruelly.

Check Your Progress-II

1. Present a brief note on the caste system as prescribed in ancient Indian scriptures. (100 words)
2. Discuss the political and social condition of India during the decade of 1930s.
3. Briefly narrate the story behind the publication of the novel *Untouchable*.

Stop to Consider

Manu Samhita

Out of the many *Dharmashastras* of Hinduism *Manu Samhita* is an ancient work in Sanskrit composed by Manu in about 2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE. Some Oriental scholars hold the view that this law book might be in existence as early as 500 BCE. *Manu-Smriti* or *Laws of Manu* is considered one of the oldest in its genre. In *Mahabharata* it is described that Manu is the first King who was endowed with great wisdom. And in Manu's race have been born all human beings, hence called *Manavas*. *Manu Samhita* has 2,694 stanzas in 12 chapters. The story regarding its origin tells that ten great sages approached Manu and asked to declare to them the sacred laws of caste. Manu acceded to their request. He assigned this task of explaining to his disciple and student Bhrigu. The laws were originally taught to Manu by Brahma, the Creator according to Hinduism. Thus the laws are of divine origin and Manu has simply laid them down in writing. However, this Brahminical belief that *Manu Smriti* is divine in origin is not shared by Oriental scholars of the western world.

It deals with interesting cosmogony, definitions of what is right and fit (dharma), the sacraments, initiation and Vedic study, forms of marriage, hospitality and funerary rites, dietary laws, pollution and purification. *Manu Samhita* prescribes a four class (*varna*) society. *Manu Samhita* similarly lays down rules regarding the position women in the society and opposes any type of freedom to them. In Verses IX to XVIII, it even discourages women from reading Holy Scriptures. Some of the

codes of conduct are related to the caste system and discuss the stages of life. *Manu Samhita* greatly exaggerates the position and utility of the *Brahmin* caste to the society and places the *Shudras* in despicable position only to be despised and exploited as outcastes. But the codes of law prescribed in *Manu Samhita* were not laws rather were norms associated with social obligations and ritual requirements. *Manu Samhita* is one of the most heavily criticized of the scriptures of Hinduism for its controversial prescriptions for the society. How controversial the recommendations of *Manu Samhita* can be assessed from the following lines:

- *Brahmanas* are assigned the task of studying and teaching since they sprang from the mouth of Brahma.
- *Kshatriyas* are assigned the duty of protecting the people. They are created from the arms of Brahma.
- The *Vaishyas* are to carry out trade and commerce and they are created from the thighs of Brahma.
- The *Shudras* are to serve meekly the three castes above them since they are created from the feet of Brahma.

(Bühler, George tr: *The Laws of Manu*. Banarsidass (Reprint from Oxford University's 1886-edition). Delhi, 1984.)

9.3 PREFACE TO *UNTOUCHABLE* BY E. M. FORSTER

Forster in the preface to *Untouchable* admits that a book like this could only have been written by an Indian because the subject matter is so that no westerner could have delved deep into it to portray the problem as realistically as Mr. Mulk Raj Anand did. Forster considers the *Untouchable* a clean book although it deals with the topic of toilet cleaning and the life of toilet cleaners in the context of the Indian Hindu society.

No European writer could have ever taken up such a restricted topic as the subject matter of a novel, asserts Forster. Anand could take up such a challenging topic to deal with in his first novel because he looked at the subject matter as a detached outsider. According to Forster, Mulk Raj Anand could do it because being a *Kshatriya* (upper caste Hindu) himself he looked at the problem of the inhuman oppression of the Untouchables from outside. Even a writer belonging to the untouchable community

or a European could not have written a novel like *Untouchable* because the former would have been too much involved with the subject and the latter could not have perceived the real everyday troubles of an untouchable, adds Forster. Forster further reiterates that Mulk Raj Anand could take up such a subject to deal with in his first novel because he has come to the world of fiction through his studies in philosophy that has given him a profound depth of understanding. Forster admires Anand for keeping the narration of the book surprisingly clean despite the fact the he dealt with the usually despised subject of human body relieving itself. Many societies, even in the West, teach their children to think of human excretion as a shameful act and have physically and psychologically considered it as evil. However, Forster acknowledges that the Indians are quite frank about this daily ritual of purgation as necessary as any other natural activities of the body like sleeping.

Forster expresses his shock at the condition of the Indian toilet cleaners by saying that their condition is even worse than that of an American black slave. The segregation suffered by the Indian toilet cleaners is much more worse than the social segregation suffered by the blacks in the United States of America as the untouchable in India is excluded from all types of social interaction and also the emotional shelter of religion. An Untouchable in India is not allowed to enter any Hindu temple nor is he regarded as a member of the religious fold; he lives and dies a life of a social outcaste. He has to announce his presence so as to warn the orthodox higher class Hindus to take precautions to avoid touching him.

The portrayal of the character of Bakha is life-like and perfectly realistic, feels Forster. Commenting on the structure of the novel Forster says that the novel is simply planned and has a form. One day in the life of untouchable Bakha in the small town of Bulashah forms the narrative of the novel. The first incident of Bakha accidentally 'touching' a higher caste Hindu in the market brings in the theme of social discrimination and oppression of the lower castes in Indian society. The novel offers three solutions to this human problem of oppression of a section of the downtrodden--- first solution is that of Hutchinson, the Salvationist missionary who proposes to Bakha to convert to Christianity, a religion which considers every human being as equal regardless of caste

and race. The second solution is Gandhi, who declares that every Indian is equal irrespective of caste, language and religion. The third solution, a more convincing one, is the introduction of flush system latrines which would automatically eradicate manual scavenging. Bakha, at the end of the day, returns to his home torn between the Mahatma and the Machine and hoping that a change is at hand.

Check Your Progress-III

1. Summarize E.M. Forster's 'Preface' to *Untouchables*. (100 words)

9.4 UNTOUCHABLE SYNOPSIS

9.4.1 Bakha, the Sweeper, starts his day

Untouchable is the story of Bakha, an eighteen year old low-caste Hindu whose hereditary occupation has been to clean the latrines of the high caste people and sweep the streets in the fictional town of Bulashah. He is the son of Lakha, who is gradually retiring from the occupation and handing over his responsibility to Bakha. Bakha's brother Rakha and his grown up and beautiful sister, Sohini are the other members of his family. Bakha's mother has been dead long ago. The novel is a day's story in the life of Bakha.

Like everyday else Bakha is woken up by the shouts of cuss words of his father to go to his daily task of cleaning latrines. Lakha, his father, has of late developed a sense of inertia and gradually handing over the tasks to his son that once used to be his duty. Bakha wakes up because Charat Singh, a famous hockey player and a Havildar with the 38 Dogra regiment of British Indian Army, too shouts at him to clean his toilet so that he can use it. Charat Singh also promises Bakha to give him a hockey stick if he meets him (Charat Singh) in the evening. Bakha starts his day by going about his daily business of cleaning latrines. As usual he finishes his duty soon and returns home tired and thirsty.

Like everyday he wants his breakfast and a cup of hot tea badly. But today he finds that there is no water in the house. His sister Sohini goes out with an earthen pitcher

to collect water from the well of the locality. But being an untouchable the social customs do not allow her to draw water from the community well like the upper caste Hindus. Her heart sinks when she sees a long queue of untouchable women already waiting much before her for some upper caste man to pass by who can draw water for them. Among the waiting low caste women there was Gulaboo, the washerwoman and mother of one of Bakha's friend Ram Charan. She is a very quarrelsome woman. She provokes Sohini for a quarrel but Sohini remains calm and composed while waiting for a high caste man to draw water for them. Finally they find Pundit Kali Nath, a priest of the local temple, who is passing by and make a collective request to him to draw water for them. He accepts their request to draw water for them. He accepts their request neither for his love nor he is sympathetic to these untouchables but because he is suffering from chronic constipation and he believes that some sort of physical activity like drawing water from the well would help in moving his bowel. By nature he is a very lecherous person and while drawing water he casts a lusty glance at Sohini. To realize his lustful desire he wants Sohini to come to the temple so that he can make amorous advances. He tells Sohini to come to the temple to sweep the temple courtyard. Sohini cannot disobey the orders of a Brahmin priest and complies to go to the temple and sweep the courtyard. Pundit Kali Nath, in return, gives her water first although other women were waiting much before her. Sohini returns home with a pitcher of water and serves tea to her brother. After having tea and breakfast Bakha goes out with a broom and a basket to sweep the street which is originally the task of his father but today his father has feigned illness and the responsibility of the job falls on Bakha.

Bakha has always been enamoured by the British soldiers (Tommies) whom he always observes in their camps nearby his home in the untouchables colony. Many a times he too has wanted to be an educated man, and a *sahib*. But for a low caste sweeper going to school and getting educated is not that easy. First, the parents of high caste Hindus will not agree to send their children to a school to study along with a low caste boy, secondly, the teacher will not pollute himself by teaching to an untouchable student. But Bakha has a great passion for education. He meets a 5th class student of a school, son of a *Babu*, and strikes a deal with him that he would pay him an *anna* (equal to six

paisa, a unit of Indian money at that time) for every lesson he teaches him. After settling the matter of his education with the boy he happily goes to the town. The town looked attractive and colourful to him as he has come to the town after almost a month to sweep the streets. He looks at the variety of shops selling different wares like clothes, grocery, vegetables, sweetmeat, photos etc. He looks at the signboards of doctors, lawyers, shops and wished he could read them at the same time he consoles himself remembering that he has made a deal with the school boy to teach him. He buys a packet of cigarettes from a pan shop. The shopkeeper accepts money from him only after sprinkling water on it. Bakha realizes that he has not bought the matches. He requests a Muslim man smoking his *hookah* to light his cigarette. He allows him to light his cigarette. Bakha smokes feeling like a confident man and moves in the market. His eyes get struck with the sweetmeat stall displaying mouth watering items. He buys *jalebis*, the cheapest of sweets paying four *annas*, after a lot of deliberation with himself as he has only eight *annas* on him. Bakha placed the coins on the shoe board of the shop and the assistant of the shop sprinkles water on the coins before taking them. Eating from the packet of *jalebis* Bakha strolls in the street looking around the shops and signboards when he accidentally bumps into a high caste Hindu man. The man shouts at him accusing him of not announcing his customary call to warn other people that an untouchable is coming.

You swine, you dog, why didn't you shout and warn me of your approach? ... Don't you know, you brute, that you must not touch me! (P-38)

A scene is created by the high caste man and he accuses Bakha of polluting him by touching and now he has to take bath again to purify himself totally upsetting his daily routine. A crowd gathers and sneers at Bakha holding him responsible for the ordeal of the high caste Hindu man. A shocked Bakha stands there with jaws dropped and hands folded in humility admitting his mistake. Notwithstanding Bakha's acquiescence the high caste man slaps Bakha in the market before the gathering of a crowd. His packet of *jalebis* fall scattered on the ground. The matter would have further worsened had Bakha not been saved by a Muslim *tongawala* from that humiliating situation.

Distressed Bakha, after the incident at the market comes to the temple to clean the temple courtyard. He wonders at the huge statues of the gods and goddesses on the temple gate and the walls and out of great curiosity peeks into the temple climbing a few steps to see the temple services that is going on inside. Suddenly he hears a commotion of somebody shouting “polluted, polluted”. It was the priest Pundit Kali Nath who comes out of the temple running followed by Sohini in a distraught state. For a moment Bakha thinks that it is his going so near the statues has polluted the temple. But later he gets a clear picture of what exactly has happened. In fact it is the priest Pundit Kali Nath who has attempted to outrage the modesty of his sister Sohini in the temple premises when she shouts and protests to escape the priest’s sexual assault, Pundit Kali Nath makes a noise that he has been polluted by the touch of the untouchable girl. When Bakha hears this from his sister he angrily returns to confront the crowd and the priest as well. Sohini dissuades him from doing any such thing because it would be too embarrassing for her. He sends her sister home.

After the unpleasant incident of attempted sexual assault on Sohini Bakha sends her home and the day’s task of begging for food from the houses in the alley now falls on Bakha. He wanders in the silversmith’s alley asking for food, customary for a low caste sweeper to beg for food everyday from the houses he cleans. He loudly asks for food “Bread for the sweeper, mother, bread for the sweeper”, (P-59) moving from door to door but gets no response from any of the houses. He is exhausted and terribly tired and so sits in front of a house and soon dozes off. In his sleep he dreams of weird and disparate things. He sees he is being driven in a bullock cart in the midst of a most marvelous city; he encounters a wedding procession of brightly dressed happy people, a Sikh band dressed in the uniform of the English Army, he sees himself standing on a railway platform where forty freight wagon stood with engines on both ends, he sees two trucks loaded with boulders and he is sitting in one of them wearing a solar topee, he hears a lot of noise and sees that the some coolies are pushing a coach into the shed, he sees many such incoherent things in his dream till he gets woken up by the invocations of an ascetic. Hearing the invocation “*Alakh, Alakh*” of the Sadhu a housewife comes out with a plateful of food and she does not expect to find the untouchable Bakha sitting on her doorstep. She is irritated and angry at the presence

of an untouchable and scolds Bakha for defiling her house. Bakha admits his guilt but also informs the woman of the purpose of his coming that is, asking for bread. The woman wants to extract some work from Bakha before giving him bread. So she tells Bakha to clean the drain and when Bakha starts cleaning the drain with a broom the woman makes her child relieve in the drain itself. Bakha is filled with a sense of revulsion; the woman throws a piece of bread at Bakha from the upstairs of her house. Bakha feels greatly disgusted at this humiliating behaviour of the housewife and leaves the place.

Check Your Progress-IV

1. Narrate the incident in which Bakha is slapped by an upper caste Hindu. (60 words)
2. Comment on the sexual assault on Sohini by Pundit Kali Nath.
3. Describe the mistreatment meted out to Bakha by the woman in the silversmith's alley.

9.4 .2 Bakha returns home after his morning shift duty

A distraught Bakha returns home after the humiliating experiences he suffers at the hands of the high caste people. He broods over the events that have happened with him in the morning—the slap of the high caste man in front of a crowd in the market; the expletives people in the crowd used for him; the sexual assault on his sister by Pundit Kali Nath and his helplessness in the matter to give justice to his sister and the humiliating behavior the woman in the lane subjected him to plays constantly in his mind making him sad and very disturbed. He reflects upon his miserable life and a terrible sense of self-pity envelopes him. At home Lakha, his father, was hungry and is waiting for food, Rakha, his brother, has gone on collecting food from the houses and Sohini, his sister, after the traumatic experience at the temple has returned home. Bakha is now in a dilemma as to how to disclose these happenings of the morning to his father because he knows that for all this his father would blame him not the others. So he decides that it is better not to tell anything to his father. But from his behavior Lakha comes to know that something has gone wrong with his son. When Lakha asks him about his angry mood Bakha explodes, the suppressed anger and grief gushes out. He tells everything about all those humiliating things that have happened to him and

his sister in the morning. After listening to Bakha, his father tells him that all the high caste people are not as bad as he thinks them to be, there are many good high caste people too. He tells Bakha a story of a high caste *Hakim* (a country doctor) Bhagwan Das who had saved him (Bakha) when he was seriously ill as a child. The father advises Bakha that he has to work and live in this place in future and there is no point feeling insulted and having a grudge towards the high caste people. Bakha is moved by the story of the high caste *Hakim* but when he visualizes his future in the present situation his heart sinks further thinking about the miserable state of condition lying ahead of him for the rest of his life. Bakha feels suffocated and leaves the home telling that he is going to the marriage ceremony of Ram Charan's (his Washerman friend) sister. The moment he thinks of Ram Charan's sister his childhood memories crowd his mind. He recollects the days when as children they were playing marriage and Ram Charan's sister used to be his wife.

Bakha goes out of his suffocating home and meets his two intimate friends Ram Charan, the washerman's son and Chota, the cobbler boy. It is the day of Ram Charan's sister's marriage and he has secretly collected a few *ludus* (sugar plums) from his home. All three escape to a secluded place in the Bulashah Hills. Chota notices the melancholic mood of Bakha and asks him the reason behind it. Bakha narrates his experiences of humiliation that have happened with him in the morning; the slapping of the man in the market for just accidentally touching him, the sexual assault on his sister by Pundit Kali Nath and the throwing of the bread at him by the woman in the silversmith alley. Chota listens to Bakha's story of humiliation and feels sympathetic and plans to take revenge against the Pundit. Ram Charan cannot stay for long as he may be required in the ongoing marriage ceremony of his sister so they decide to depart.

Soon after his friends depart Bakha is left alone he feels a terrible sense of loneliness. He broods over his present state and desperately wants to escape from this miserable life but a growing feeling of pessimism envelopes him that he cannot get away from this wretched life of an untouchable. He reaches the barracks of English soldiers. It was empty and he sees a hat (solar topee) hanging on the wall. The hat is not an

ordinary one; many legends are associated with it. Some say that the hat is a symbol of authority of the British. Others say that this hat remains here because it has been forgotten by a *Sahib* who never returned to reclaim it and thus it remains hanging here. There is also a widespread rumour that once a *sahib* was court martialled for shooting a sepoy. Since a *sahib* cannot be put behind bars in the lock up for the crime his hat and belt was kept in the lock up symbolically. The British officer was being helped by his superior to escape the punishment and since then his hat hangs on the wall. Bakha gets quite attracted to the solar hat hanging from a peg on the verandah of the 38 Dogra's quarterguard. At one point he thinks of stealing it but desists thinking of the consequences. It is the afternoon and the whole barrack is silent and nobody is outside perhaps the soldiers are resting. Bakha remembers the promise of Havildar Charat Singh who has promised to give him a hockey stick. He waits in front of the Havildar's room for quite some time and finally Havildar Charat Singh does come out and sees Bakha waiting for him. Surprisingly for Bakha Charat Singh behaves in a very cordial manner with him and most of all tells him to bring a piece of burning charcoal from the kitchen. For Bakha it is something very surprising where others do not even touch him thinking that they will be polluted, Charat Singh, on the contrary, sends him to the kitchen the most sacred part of a Hindu household. Bakha happily goes to the kitchen and brings a piece of charcoal for the hubble bubble (hookah). Charat Singh offers him tea and also quite generously gives him a brand new hockey stick. Bakha is greatly elated receiving the hockey stick, his happiness at getting the hockey stick knows no bounds and the Havildar's kindness moves Bakha deeply. After getting the hockey stick Bakha gets so excited that he searches for his friends to play. What is the use of the stick without a game of hockey, he thinks. His friends Chota, Ram Charan and others gather and soon an unplanned hockey match between the 31st Punjab and 38 Dogras regiment starts. In the match Bakha playing for the 38 Dogras scores a goal which the opposition claims as a foul and a brawl between the opposing players begins which leads to stone pelting. On the boundary lines of the ground the younger brother of a player was sitting and was hit with a stone on the head thrown by Ram Charan. The boy starts to bleed profusely and falls unconscious. Bakha lifts the boy in his arms and takes him to his home. The boy's mother comes out and sees that an untouchable

sweeper is carrying her injured son. She screams at Bakha for defiling her child by touching him and accuses him of killing her son. The boy's elder brother tries to convince his mother that it is not the fault of Bakha and he just wanted to help but mother of the child remains unconvinced and continues to rebuke Bakha severely. A dejected Bakha leaves the place with sense of deep hurt. He laments his misfortune that the happiness Havildar Charat Singh has given him by treating him well and gifting him a new hockey stick lasted only for half an hour.

“Unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?” (P-110)

Check Your Progress-V

1. Discuss Bakha's friendship with Ram Charan and Chota. (60 words)
2. Comment on Charat Singh's treatment of Bakha.

9.4.3. Bakha expelled from his home

After the bitter experience in the hockey match Bakha returns home in the afternoon. Back at home his father is furious because leaving behind his afternoon task of cleaning the latrines he was playing outside. His brother Rakha is now preparing with the broom and basket to go on his behalf. When his father Lakha sees him he shouts at him using select expletives like “Son of a pig! Son of a dog!” (P-108) and accuses him of being apathetic to the old father. When father rains abuses on him Bakha keeps his cool and slowly moves to collect the basket and the broom and escape his father's wrath by going on his daily task. He finds that his brother Rakha is standing with the basket and the broom and is about to leave on the task of cleaning latrines. The father shouts at him again not to touch the broom and leave the house immediately never to return. Bakha has faced this type of wrath and even occasional beating of his father before too but today it is beyond his level of tolerance. He leaves his home.

He wanders on the river side aimlessly thinking that can it be the same father who had once begged for his life at the *Hakim's* when he was a child? He is brooding over the undeserved humiliation he has so far been subjected to he notices that a man is walking up to him. He is Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of local Salvationist Army, a Padre who preaches Christianity and converts low caste Hindus into Christianity. He is dressed

like a native Indian so that he can mix well with the untouchables and convert them to Christianity. He comes to Bakha in order to persuade him to convert. When he comes and talks to Bakha, he (Bakha) becomes surprised that a *sahib* is not only taking notice but also talking so sweetly to him. He feels greatly elated with a sense of gratitude. Then he broaches the subject of *Yessuh Massih* (Jesus Christ). He says to Bakha come to *Yessuh Messih* and he will save him from his sins. He talks a lot with Bakha about Christianity and now and then would sing a hymn from the *Bible* which made Bakha confused. Bakha got further confused by terms like ‘sinner’, ‘saviour’ and ‘Son of God’, ‘forgiven’, ‘sacrifice’. What puzzled Bakha the most about Christianity is that how can a human being be the son of God? Why does the Colonel tell him that he is a sinner when he has not done anything wrong? Why did Jesus die for humanity so on and so forth? He accompanies Colonel Hutchinson to the church of Bulashah. At the gate of the church Hutchinson’s wife Mary Hutchinson shouts at him “Oh, is that what you have been doing, going to these blackies again!” (122). The angry words of the *mem-sahib* seemed more terrible to Bakha than the abuse of the man who had slapped him in the market that morning. Apprehending more trouble Bakha extricates himself from the situation and flees from the place when Colonel Hutchinson was reciting “Blessed by Thy love, blessed be Thy name” (123).

A depressed Bakha listlessly moves towards the railway station in the midst of nauseating scenes of beggars and lepers. When he reaches the railway station he hears two roars of sound, one is the sound of a train stopping at the platform and the other is a chorus of “*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*”. Bakha comes to know that Mahatma Gandhi is coming to Bulashah for a public meeting after he has been released from the jail. Bakha joins the crowd waiting for Gandhi and hears their conversation. When a rustic fellow asks “Will he really overthrow the government?” (129) a *Babu* replies that Gandhi has the *Shakti* to defeat the mighty British because of the *dharmic* discipline that he follows. The *Babu* talked of how Gandhiji wants to empower the people of the village through *Panchayats* and advises the villagers not to go the government courts rather settle their cases in the *Panchayats* itself. Bakha does not understand anything of this discussion but he becomes interested when he hears that Gandhi is going to speak on the uplift of the *Harijans*, the untouchables and he eagerly waits for Gandhi.

Bakha hears that Gandhi has been restricted by the British government not to speak on any political topic in his public meetings as a condition of his release from the jail. Thus, he can only speak on the *Harijans*, the God's Men, as Gandhi called the untouchables. The whole atmosphere echoed with the slogan of "*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai, Hindu-Mussulman-Sikh ki jai, Harijan Ki jai.*" Gandhiji gets off a motor car and heads towards the stage. Huge gathering of the masses rush towards Gandhi to have a better view of him. Bakha too wants to rush along the crowd to see Gandhi from close but desists because if he touches somebody of the high caste, even accidentally, there will be a scene and Gandhiji would be too far away to save him. Bakha searches for a vantage point from where he could get a better sight of Gandhi. He finds a tree and climbs on it and sits on a branch high up. The meeting is about to start. Gandhi begins a silent prayer and stillness reigns on the crowd. In this stillness Bakha forgets all the bitter experiences he has gone through in the day—the slap of the high caste man in the market that morning; Pundit Kali Nath's sexual assault on his sister Sohini; the humiliation he has suffered at the hands of the woman in the silversmith's alley; the mistreatment he has received from the mother of the injured boy; the walk on the hills with his friends Chota and Ram Charan; his expulsion from home by his father; Colonel Hutchinson's attempt to convert him to Christianity and his angry and shouting wife; he forgets everything and concentrates on Gandhi's speech. Finally Gandhi begins to speak. He begins by saying:

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity. 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. (136)

The beginning part of Gandhi's speech is beyond the comprehension of Bakha. Gandhi continued saying that he considers untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. He narrates a story of his childhood experience with an untouchable boy Uka. He used to touch the untouchable boy without any inhibition despite the fact that it was socially unacceptable. He also used to argue with his mother that there is nothing wrong in

touching a low caste man. His mother advised him that the shortest way to purification after touching a low caste is to touch a Mussalman. So Gandhi out of respect for his mother used to touch untouchables and then touch a Muslim. However he never did it out any religious belief but respect for his mother. Bakha's interest increased in the speech of Gandhi when he spoke of his childhood experience with an untouchable boy. He starts to identify himself with Gandhi's childhood untouchable friend Uka. Gandhi continues that God is the purifier of the polluted soul and to consider anyone born in India as polluted and unclean is a great sin. Listening to the story of Gandhi's attitude towards the untouchable Bakha feels that this man has real sympathy for the untouchables. Gandhi further says that the untouchables are not just cleaning the latrines they are cleaning the Hindu society. If he ever gets another birth he would pray to be born as a scavenger. If any Hindu oppresses them then it should be understood that the fault lies with the person who oppresses the *Harijans* not with the Hindu religion. Gandhi continuing his advice says that *Harijans* should only accept whole good quality grain from the high caste people. Each and every word uttered by Gandhi pierces through the soul of Bakha. At one point of the speech Bakha feels like shouting at Gandhi from amidst the crowd that look Sir here is an untouchable who was beaten up by a high caste man just for touching him accidentally, he was humiliated by a woman for being an untouchable. Gandhi in his speech also advised the outcaste community to remain clean and give up bad habits. Then Gandhi says that no *harijan* should accept leftover food of any caste Hindu. Bakha feels like shouting back at Gandhi that today morning a woman threw leftover bread at him.

After the meeting of Gandhi the crowd gradually dispersed. Two gentlemen Iqbal Nath Sarshar, the young poet and the Editor of *Nawan Jug* (New Era) and the other R. N. Bashir, western educated Barrister at Law, start a debate on Gandhi's speech. R. N. Bashir rubbishes the speech of Gandhi saying that it is full of contradictions. On one hand Gandhi says of eradicating untouchability and on the other asserts his being an orthodox Hindu. In twentieth century he urges people to go back to spinning wheel when the western world has been rapidly getting industrialized. The young poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar counters that it is unfair to abuse Gandhi as he is the greatest liberating force of this age. He may have limitations but fundamentally his vision is sound. The

young poet continues, India was a rich country with abundance of natural resources but preferred to remain an agricultural country. That is where India shunned machines but a time will come when India will have to adopt machines in order to progress. The westernized gentleman says one who considers this world as a *maya* (illusion) will not accept the machine. The poet asserts that in future machines will have to be accepted to create a casteless society because it is the profession of a person which classifies his caste. But when machine will be introduced castes will not be based on profession and hence it will automatically vanish. Asserting the role of machines in changing the traditional professions he says:

When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchables. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without any one having to handle it--- the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (146)

Driving home his point on the caste system in the Hindu society the poet argues that in the *Upanishads* it is said that man is born and reborn till he is released from the bondage of birth. The poet explains that the wily Brahmins have associated the birth of a person in high or low caste to the philosophy of *Karma*. Those who are born in high caste are enjoying the fruits of their good *Karma* of their previous birth and the people who are born in lower caste are suffering the bad *Karma* of their earlier birth. This is misinterpretation of the *Karma* philosophy. Europeans have misunderstood the word *maya* as illusion but the real meaning of *maya* is not illusion but magic. The poet asserts that the Mahatma is more convincing in his views on untouchability than in his political and economic views. This inequality can be destroyed only by democracy. A congressman criticizes R. N. Bashir for his westernized attire, and attitude to Gandhi; countering that criticism the poet says that external looks of a person does not matter at all because a farmer if washed and attired properly can look like an aristocrat and can also rule the kingdom as an old Indian proverb goes. Essentially all humanity is

one and equal. The poet suggests that for a better and progressive Hindu society all must strive to destroy the hierarchy of caste and inequality.

Most of the high sounding debate between Iqbal Nath Sarshar and R. N. Bashir remains incomprehensible to Bakha but the poet's words that "Machines which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it" echoes in his ears for long. Sun sets in the western horizon Bakha reflects on the speech of the Mahatma that a *Brahmin* and *Bhangi* (untouchable) are equal human beings. He questions himself that can he free himself from scavenging and he gets a positive answer that the machine will one day set him free from this wretched life.

Check Your Progress-VI

1. Why was Bakha expelled from home by his father? (30 words)
2. Summarize Gandhi's speech. (100 words)
3. Summarize the intellectual debate between Sarshar and Bashir. (120 words)

9.5 THEMES

2.5.1 The Practice of Untouchability

In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* the central theme is untouchability. Caste exploitation has been prevalent in India down the ages. Lower caste people are looked down upon and ill treated by the upper caste Hindus. Mulk Raj Anand treats the theme of exploitation in the name of caste as the crux of the narrative of the novel. He presents the inhuman caste system prevalent in Hindu society in the story of the untouchable boy Bakha and shows a mirror to the society which is so oblivious of the plight of the low caste people living in the same society. He graphically presents the extent caste system affects the life of the outcastes like Bakha and his family. The story of Bakha is a microscopic representation of the general condition of the low caste people even in the twentieth century Indian society. Anand is well aware of the inherent caste system and religious divide existent in the Indian society as remnants of the caste based tradition prevalent in the past as recommended in Hindu scripture *Manu Samhita*. The inhuman episodes that Bakha is subjected to in the course his day's life in the fictional town of Bulashah Anand ruthlessly displays the upper caste prejudice towards the

outcastes. The story of Bakha's life of a day in fact is a medium of highlighting the caste exploitation of the untouchables in especially Hindu society.

The sub-human existence of the untouchables is graphically presented by Anand in the very beginning of the book.

There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on the banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes, heaped up to be made into fuel cakes, and the biting, choking, pungent fumes that oozed from its sides. (1)

Bakha's day starts with the rude call of his father to wake up and go to clean the latrines of caste Hindus who are waiting for him. He carries out his task efficiently and returns only to find that there is no water at home. His sister goes to fetch water. But for a low caste woman fetching water from the community well is not a normal task. She is not allowed to climb upto the circular platform of the well as it would pollute the whole source of water of the society. So she can just wait till some caste Hindu person comes and draws water for them. She waits in the queue of already waiting outcaste women for an uncertain period of time till a caste Hindu person who is entitled to draw water from the well appears. Just for a pitcher full of water, so basic a need for sustenance of life, she has to put up with the insulting words of Gulaboo and the lustful looks of Pundit Kali Nath. When Pundit Kali Nath appears and draws water for the low caste women, he does not do it out of any sense of sympathy or fellow feeling for the outcastes but to make his bowels move and relieve him of his chronic constipation. Pundit Kali Nath's sexual assault is a display of brazen hypocrisy of the upper caste. Bakha peeps into the temple to get a view of the statues as he is not allowed to enter the place of God. The untouchables though remain in the margins of Hinduism but are deprived of the emotional shelter of religion. Bakha, as the brother of Sohini, is helpless to confront the Brahmin as he is merely an untouchable, the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Bakha has no other alternative but to digest this humiliation.

The slapping of Bakha by a caste Hindu man in the market for the crime of accidentally touching him is another instance of caste exploitation. An outcaste, as per the customs, must notify his presence by shouting “Posh keep away, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!” (42). Bakha buys cigarettes and sweetmeat from the shops in the market. The money he gives is not accepted without purifying it by sprinkling water on it. This practice crosses all limits of degrading a human being to the level of an animal. An untouchable latrine cleaner has to collect the leftover food from the houses of upper caste Hindus; another practice of degrading a section of the society and suppressing them perpetually. Bakha goes from house to house begging for leftover food but nobody responds. He dozes off in front of a house. Again he is accused of defiling the house because he sat in front of the house. The woman in the silversmith’s alley comes out to give bread to the *Sadhu* first but reluctant to give anything to Bakha. In reality the *Sadhu* has not done anything for the woman but for his higher caste he is treated well and given good food whereas Bakha who cleans their toilet and drain everyday is given food grudgingly. Before giving him bread the woman makes her child relieve in the drain so that Bakha can clean it and the wage would be the piece of bread. A familiar attitude of caste Hindus towards the outcastes.

In the hockey match the boy gets injured, instinctively Bakha lifts the boy to take him to his home. The mother of the boy shouts at him for polluting his son by lifting him. His altruism soon turns into a crime. The mother of the boy becomes so blind to the reality that the person who helped in bringing the boy home is being accused of polluting him. Bakha’s low caste makes him get humiliated at many junctures of his life.

Bakha wants to study and be a gentleman like the British soldiers. But the caste system prevalent in the society will not allow him to go to a school. No teacher would teach an outcaste student and no parent would send their children to study alongside an untouchable. The suppression of the untouchables is so complete that along with their present their future too has been put into uncertainty by denying them education. The upper caste domination has closed all future avenues of development for the outcastes.

Anand offers three options to the untouchables at the end of the novel to change their age old destiny. First of the option to escape this caste exploitation and suppression is to convert to Christianity, the option Bakha was offered by Colonel of the Salvationist Army Mr. Hutchison. The second option is Gandhi's promise of an equal society where a Brahmin and a bhangi will enjoy equal rights as citizens of a democratic country. The third option is a hope for the future that machine would clean dung without having any human intervention. This would bring an end to the practice of manual scavenging and set the outcastes free from their wretched life, as claimed by as the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar. The untouchables lead an undignified life because of their profession when machine will take over their work they would not be considered as untouchables anymore. Bakha thinks one day it will happen and he can escape from this suffocating life.

9.5.2 Alienation

The other most important theme of *Untouchable* is individual's growing feeling of social alienation. Since the society has looked down upon Bakha and closed all avenues of improvement in future for him he feels intensely alienated. He attempts to escape from this society which is so suffocating for him. Bakha is a normal eighteen year old young man with the usual hopes and aspirations for a better life in future. However, looking at the attitude of the upper caste people of the society towards him he is filled with a sense of pessimism. He is enamoured looking at the British soldiers (Tommies) and wants to be like them. He wants to be a gentleman by being educated. But education for an outcaste man is not only difficult but also impossible. He contacts a babu's son reading in class five and convinces him to teach him one lesson at a time for a consideration of one anna per lesson. That is his zeal for education. The incident of slapping in the market for accidentally touching a high caste Hindu further alienates him from the society. He goes to the temple wants to see the services inside but is not allowed. When Hutchinson proposes him to become a Christian he would have accepted it had Colonel Hutchinson been able to explain to Bakha who *Yessuh Messih* (Jesus Christ) is and how can he save him. He feels powerless before the monolithic system of caste in the society so cannot avenge his sister's molester when her modest is outraged by a Brahmin. Rigid caste system obstructs in the way of his realization of

his aspirations which alienates him from the society. The cry of desperation of Bakha after the hockey match when he was severely scolded by the injured boy's mother "Unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?" (110)

9.5.3 Attitude of High Caste people to the untouchables

The general attitude of the higher caste Hindus towards the outcastes is that of despise and hatred. The outcastes have been denied every opportunity to improve in their lives. Rather they are suppressed to lead the life of an outcaste forever. The outcastes are made to depend on the higher caste for almost everything—water, education, medicine and treatment, food. For the very basic needs of life like food and water an outcaste totally depended on the upper caste. Anand's *Untouchable* is replete with such examples. Sohini cannot draw water straight from the well, she has to wait till an upper caste man appears to draw it for her. Bakha has to beg for leftover food moving from house to house to feed his family. The story Lakha tells to Bakha about the charity of *Hakim* Bhagwan Das who saved his life is also that of sheer dependency. An outcaste child cannot go to school as no teacher would teach him nor any parent would send their children to that school where an outcaste child studies. However, In the midst of upper caste despise for the outcastes there are islands of genuine compassion shown by a few high caste men. The prominent among them who treats Bakha as a human being is Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player. He allows Bakha to enter his kitchen, the most sacred corner of a Hindu household, shares his tea with him and most importantly gifts him a brand new hockey stick which makes Bakha immensely happy. But there are also show of duplicitous charity first by the Pundit who draws water for the outcastes from the well but with an ulterior motive of lust for Sohini. The woman in the silversmith alley throws a piece of bread at Bakha after making him clean the drain is also an act of upper caste charity done in self interest. In Hinduism it is believed that people born in the upper castes have done charity in their last life as a result of which they are enjoying their present life as upper caste people. So in order to have a good life in the next birth they have to do charity. So they do charity in drawing water for the outcaste, throwing bread at the outcaste and such other things.

But these acts of charity are never done with any genuine love or concern for the outcastes.

9.5.4 Inter-caste relations

Untouchable does not simply present the asymmetrical relationship between the upper and lower caste people in the Hindu society. It also explores the inter-caste relationships with great detail. The Hindu caste hierarchy is divided into four broad groups—*Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras*. The class that does fall within these four categories is the outcaste. The three upper castes look down upon the last class, that is, the Shudras, who do the menial jobs. After the molestation of Sohini by Pundit Kali Nath, Bakha felt distressed and furious. But he knew his limitations that he cannot do anything to the hypocrite Pundit as the latter belonged to the privileged class. His helplessness is reflected in:

A super specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like a tiger at bay. And yet there was a futility written on his face. (56)

Bakha cannot break the barriers of conventions, the conventions made by his superiors, the upper caste people to protect their own self interest. There is also an ambiguity in caste relations among the other low caste people. The washer man and cobbler class though regarded as low caste by the upper caste Hindus; but among themselves there is another stratification. The washerman and the cobbler feel superior to the sweeper. This has been well displayed in Bakha's relation with his friends Ram Charan and Chota. Bakha cannot marry Ram Charan's sister because he is considered low caste by the washerman community. There exists a hierarchy of caste among the untouchables. Ram Charan and Chota always regarded themselves as superior to Bakha in terms of caste. Bakha suffering insults at the hands of the upper caste man is one aspect of the caste division in the Hindu society. But again Gulabbo, the washerwoman, cannot tolerate Sohini. She is jealous of Sohini's beauty and looks down upon her for being a sweeper girl. She attacks Sohini using her caste which is the most convenient one to berate her. Mulk Raj Anand not only ruthlessly exposes

the upper caste people for subjecting the untouchables to oppressive exploitation but also brings to the fore the caste consciousness even among the untouchables.

9.5.5 Social Realism: Religion and Caste Discrimination

Mulk Raj Anand depicts the social realism of the age in portraying the predicament of the outcastes in *Untouchable*. Society's treatment of a section of its own population in such a brutal manner speaks volumes about the degradation the society has reached. To highlight the downward trend of the society Anand highlights a day in Bakha's life and the inhuman suffering he is subjected to. The suffering of the outcastes is rooted in the age old practice of untouchability which is associated with the religion of Hinduism. The ill treatment Bakha is subjected to for touching an upper caste man in the market, the throwing of a piece of bread at Bakha by a woman, the sexual assault on Sohini all this are part of the upper caste attitude towards the outcastes, the social realism of the age. Anand depicts a society deeply steeped in hatred for the low caste people. Bakha's money is not accepted by the pan shop owner and the confectioner before purifying show the level of caste division prevailing in the society. A distraught Bakha in exasperation cries out:

All of them abused , abused , abused why are we always abused? Because we're sweepers. I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable I am an untouchable. (43)

The woman in the silversmith's alley is reluctant to give him a piece of bread, but reverentially offers food to the Sadhu. The contrast in treatment of Bakha and the Sadhu highlights the deep rooted caste prejudice that is prevalent in the society. Bakha lifts the injured boy after the hockey match ruckus prompted by his human instincts to help an injured and unconscious boy. In return he gets a severe dressing down for touching and polluting an upper caste boy. Bakha's sense of altruism drowns in his lower caste origin. Bakha is beaten up for making physical contact, albeit unconsciously, with an upper caste man. He is accused of dereliction of duty of not announcing his presence as it was his responsibility as an outcaste to warn others so that others can be saved from getting polluted. But the social norms change upside down when Pundit Kali Nath violates the modesty of a reluctant Sohini. Even for this Sohini is accused of defiling the Pundit. Society remains a mute spectator to the crime

committed by a Brahmin. Anand depicts a society steeped in caste prejudice towards the untouchables. Religion plays a decisive role in perpetuating the evil system of untouchability. Most unfortunately the untouchables are not only excluded from the normal social intercourse but also deprived from the emotional shelter of religion even when they remain within the Hindu fold.

Religion plays an important role in perpetuating the evil practice of untouchability. Colonel Hutchinson persuades Bakha to convert to Christianity to end his suffering. Bakha feels that the religion good enough for his ancestors should also be good enough for him. Thus, despite the fact that being an untouchable, he is never allowed to participate in the practices of religion yet he considers it his own. Anand depicts the harsh reality of the sub-human existence of the untouchables in Indian society. The untouchables have been made to remain dependent on the upper caste people for every basic need of their life; be it water, food, cloth, and education. Anand also criticizes the upper caste Hindus by presenting how using religion as a base people have divided the society into hierarchical order and then misuse the privileges for their own benefit.

Anand's primary concern was to uplift the downtrodden lot who are isolated and unaccepted in the society. By bringing in the element of Gandhi as an instrument of change Anand has not only provided a solution for the plight of the untouchability in the novel but also enlightened his readers about such evil practices that need to be removed from the society. Gandhi clearly understands that the predicament of the untouchables is not only moral but also religious. He considers untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism and regards it a Satanic to think that anyone born as a Hindu to be impure and to be shunned by others. To bring about a change in the attitude towards the untouchables Gandhi suggests that the outcastes should maintain personal hygiene and give up drinking and gambling. They should also stop collecting leftover food from the houses of upper caste Hindus. All this will help in changing the attitude of other people about them.

Bakha's interaction with Iqbal Nath Sarshar and his ideas about flush latrine system has provided him with hope for the future. The novel ends with a positive note that

the problem of this exploited section of the society finally will find an effective solution.

9.6 CHARACTERS

Bakha

Bakha is the protagonist or the central figure of the novel *Untouchable*. The whole plot of the novel revolves around him. Commenting on the character of Bakha E.M. Forster writes in the 'Preface' to *Untouchable*:

Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive, we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso and heavy buttocks, as he does his nasty jobs, or stumps out in artillery boots in hopes of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hand.

Bakha, is eighteen year old sweeper boy and is a victim of the inhuman practice of untouchability. The novel is an exploration of the impact of caste cruelty on the adolescent mind of Bakha. He is Intelligent enough to be aware of the superior attitude of the higher caste Hindus around him. He is efficient in his work and works to please everyone who commands him to do the unpleasant task of cleaning toilets. He goes about doing his job with customary humility as the centuries of suppression and marginalization has made his community to be humble and submissive to tolerate all sorts of atrocities of the upper caste Hindus silently. In course of the narrative he is constantly reminded of his low birth by the abuses he receives starting from his father early in the morning to the upper caste man who slaps him in the market for touching him accidentally. Although he is a legitimate customer buying a packet of cigarettes from the roadside pan shop or *jalebis* from the confectionary; he has to be careful not to touch anything physically. His money is accepted only after purifying it by sprinkling water on it. The woman in the silversmith alley throws bread at him from a distance; he cannot think of going to a school and educate himself; in the hockey match he plays under a false identity that he is *sahib's* bearer. If his real identity is revealed that he is sweeper boy then other boys would not play with him. The mother of the injured boy after the hockey match uses select expletives to berate him for being an outcaste and touching her child; even Mary Hutchinson, Colonel Hutchinson's wife,

shouts at her husband for moving about with a 'blackie'. All these becomes so suffocating for him that in sheer desperation he cries "Unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?" (P-110) The discrimination and humiliation he is subjected to makes him a rebel. He wants to fight against the injustice and suppression he and his community suffers at the hands of the upper caste Hindus.

He shows a great fascination for English clothes and English way of life and wants to be like them. This shows his inclination to reject the Indian roots and adopt a culture that treats him as an equal human being without caste prejudice. When he was slapped by an upper caste Hindu in the market for touching him, from the hostile crowd a Mohammedan *tongawala* has saved him. The attitude of the British soldiers and the Mohmmadans to him was normal without any caste prejudice and this has not escaped the notice of Bakha. At the end of the novel Bakha was offered three options as solution to his problem —conversion to Christianity, Gandhi's way of a pious life and promise of an equal society, and waiting for the machine, the flush system of latrine. He rejects the first option of conversion outright. He thinks that if the present gods are good enough for his forefathers then they must be good enough for him too. What inspires him is the word of Gandhi that he has the *shakti* to bring about a change in the society where a *Brahmin* and a *Bahngi* (Toilet cleaner) will be considered equal. What he understands from the discussion between Iqbal Nath Sarshar and R. N. Bashir, the Barrister, that a machine will be introduced which would clean the latrines without any human intervention. This machine will bring about the real emancipation of the untouchables. Bakha becomes an optimist in the end of the novel. Mulk Raj Anand has presented Bakha in a condition where he struggles for a space in the society, but at the same time he doesn't leave his duty. Here he starts as a man who has to fight for his position in a largely hostile society. He believes that man is the master of his destiny and can change his fate by his own efforts howsoever faint the chances may be. The solution is not in tolerating the atrocities, but in finding out the solution to the problem of the ages-long oppressions and atrocities.

The story of Bakha is a story of attainment of self realization living in the midst of a prejudiced and highly hostile society. As In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* Moorthy

represents the Gandhi and Gandhian ideals, in *Untouchable* Bakha represents the downtrodden and the marginalized sections of the low caste Hindus in the Indian society. He struggles to find his own identity and mooring in the society. He is constantly in search of a better future, where there will be equality and no discrimination on the basis of one's birth and caste. Ultimately he finds the meaning to his life hearing the inspiring speech of Mahatma Gandhi and a future where there is possibility that he would not have to remain a sweeper forever.

Lakha, the Father

Lakha is the father of the family of three children—Bakha, Rakha and Sohini. He is the *Jamedar* or the head of the sweepers. He is, by nature, dirty, lazy, and foul mouthed. He is out and out a selfish person who always thinks of his own comforts and never bothers about his motherless children. Centuries of slavery has made him peevish, meek, weak, short tempered and a self centred man. Left with three children after his wife's death, he accepts his low position in the society, totally submissive to the high caste Hindus. Early in the morning he wakes up Bakha with insensitive abuses and forces him to go on the usual servility to the upper caste Hindus. Lakha has accepted servility to the core and hence is incapable of thinking of any revolt or resentment. He regards the high caste Hindus as superior to them because of their birth and respects them as his masters. The *Hakim* Bhagwan Das episode is a pointer to this. Bakha was seriously sick as a child and no doctor would treat him as he was an untouchable. Lakha goes to the *Hakim* and begs to treat Bakha. First he refuses to come but later he does come and treat Bakha. Lakha, unlike Bakha, does not have that fire for change and reform that burns in Bakha. Lakha symbolizes the common, submissive untouchable man of the Indian society.

Sohini

Sohini is the daughter of Lakha and sister of Bakha in the outcaste family. She is young and beautiful, modest and hard working. She has to take the household responsibility besides the cleaning of toilets of high caste Hindus, it is Sohini's beauty that evokes jealousy in Gulaboo. Pundit Kali Nath is physically attracted to her and does not hesitate to sexually assault her despite the fact that she is an untouchable. has ulterior

motives behind giving her a pitcher of water at the well, an important character in the novel because through her Anand tries to expose the moral corruption and hypocrisy that prevails in the upper caste Hindu society. Hypocrites like Pundit Kali Nath practice untouchability but given an opportunity do not hesitate to sexually assault an untouchable girl. Through the episode of Pundit Kali Nath's attempted sexual assault on Sohini, the novelist exposes the inherent contradiction in the Hindu upper caste attitude to the outcastes.

Minor Characters

Rakha

Rakha, the brother of Bakha and the second son of Lakha, represents all the negative aspects associated with the untouchable community. He symbolizes the dirty and unclean life of the untouchables. He himself is personally dirty and repulsive. He is also a very lazy by nature. He is an untouchable in the real sense of the term. When Mahatma Gandhi says that untouchables too need to reform themselves, he has untouchables like Rakha in mind.

Colonel Hutchinson

Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of the Salvationist Army, is the padre of the local church. His mission of life is to convert as much low caste Hindus as possible to Christianity. He speaks about the concept of equality of every human being in Christianity to Bakha. He offers to convert Bakha to Christianity where he would be treated as an equal human being. He tries to explain to Bakha the idea of *Yessuh Messih* (Jesus Christ), and the Christian concepts like Heaven and hell, sin, savior, sacrifice. However, he could not explain in a convincing way who *Yessuh Messih* is and why did he die. The sketchy picture of Christianity Mr. Hutchinson puts before Bakha, fails to convince him to convert. Mr. Hutchinson believed that if the missionaries in India are to succeed in converting the low caste Hindus into Christianity then they have to come in close contact with this downtrodden and marginalized Indians. His dress is funny mixture of Indian and European, a pair of white trousers, a scarlet jacket, a white turban and a red band across it. For him conversion to Christianity is the only

alternative to put an end to the caste system. The three options Bakha is offered in the novel as solution to the problem of untouchability, conversion to Christianity is one of them. Colonel Hutchinson represents the Christian missionaries who wanted to convert the gullible untouchables. However, the attitude of Mary Hutchinson, Hutchinson's wife, exposes the inherent racism that prevailed even among the Europeans about the native untouchables when she shouts at her husband for moving around with 'blackies'.

Havildar Charat Singh

Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player, is an interesting character in the novel. He is an army *Havildar* of Dogra regiment posted at Bulashah. He lives in the barracks where Bakha goes everyday to clean the latrines. He is ill tempered may be because of the piles he suffers from. Havildar Charat Singh is a contrast to the other high caste character Pundit Kali Nath. If Pundit Kali Nath and other high caste Hindus symbolize hypocrisy, cruelty, discrimination and injustice, Havildar Charat Singh represents that section of Hindu high caste people who are considerate and hold progressive views in the same Hindu society. The unique aspect of Havildar Charat Singh's character is that he is free from caste prejudice and treats Bakha humanely and affectionately unlike the other orthodox upper caste Hindus who tend to berate him. He allows Bakha to enter his kitchen, the most sacred corner of a Hindu household, to fetch burning coal for his *hookah* (the hubble bubble) and also shares tea with him, quite surprising considering the attitude of the other high caste Hindus to untouchables. He also gifts Bakha with a brand new hockey stick. All these shows Havildar Charat Singh as an affectionate human being and a man who holds progressive views about the untouchables. Havildar Charat Singh is free from the caste prejudice towards the low caste Hindus.

Bakha, throughout the day, has not found any affection from any body. It is only Charat Singh who shows a humanistic attachment to him. Through the portrayal of the character of Charat Singh, Anand stops from tarring the whole Hindu upper caste community in the same brush. There are characters like Charat Singh who is an exception.

Mahatma Gandhi

It goes to the credit of Mulk raj Anand that he delineated the real character of Gandhi in his novel *Untouchable*. Describing the charismatic power of Gandhi Anand writes:

This strange man seemed to have the genius that could be a single dramatic act, rally multicoloured, multi-tongued India to himself. (134)

Gandhi appears as messiah for Bakha who has lost all hopes of future. It is Gandhi's promise of an impending social reformation where a Brahmin and a Bhangi will enjoy equal rights fills Bakha with a sense of optimism. Gandhi's scathing attack on the practice of untouchability inspires Bakha. When Gandhi says that untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism, he strikes a chord in the heart of Bakha.

Iqbal Nath Sarshar

Iqbal Nath Sarshar, the young poet and the editor of *Nuwan Jug*, is a man with revolutionary and progressive ideas. He is strongly against idea of untouchability. He serves the purpose of the mouthpiece of the author. He acts like the spokesperson of the author in articulating the vision of the future of India where machines will overtake human intervention in cleaning latrines thereby putting an end to manual scavenging effectively. He provides a real and practicable solution to the problem of untouchability by the introduction of flush system.

The practice of untouchability is the one of the most evil practices in Hinduism. It is practiced even today in some societies and dalits and low caste people being the victims. Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar have spoken against it most vehemently. Society cannot progress if one section of the society is excluded by the other section.

9.7 NARRATIVE STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Mulk raj Anand adopts a unique narrative style to tell the story of Bakha. He adopts the stream of consciousness technique in which was the dominant narrative technique of the period being followed by the prominent literary persons of the age like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and others. This technique is used to delve

deep into the mind of the central character Bakha who is tormented by the mistreatment meted out to him by the society. *Untouchable* can be regarded as a psychological novel as well for it gives us a vivid account of Bakha's thoughts and ponderings most of which are fragmentary in nature.

The novel has also dream sequence in which Bakha finds himself surrounded by a group of monkeys. Through this the novelist wants to project the world view of Bakha which even haunts him in his subconscious mind and confines him within a bleak world.

There are also a number of flashbacks used along with symbolic images and thoughts combined with an awareness of the reality that renders an element of modernity to the novel.

Anand uses a number of images that are recurrent in the novel, mostly the images of the sun and the river. The sun is the symbol of creativity and vital force of life and is seen as a contrast to the lives of the people like Bakha and others.

The image of the river is symbolic of the anguish and grief of the people as it stands for the flow of existence which is past change. It symbolizes that nothing can change for the downtrodden outcastes.

The novelist uses a number of words, phrases, and idioms which reflect the Indian way of speaking. There are many words in Hindi and Punjabi that have not been translated into English like *girja ghar*, *jalebi*, *babu*, *harijan* etc. Whereas some abusive words in Hindi are translated into English like 'Son of a pig, swine, dog' etc. The aim was to capture the flavor and colour of a particular village in Punjab during pre-independence times and give a realistic representation to it.

9.8 SUMMING UP

1930s was a period when the winds of change was blowing all over India. A social reformation was deeply felt by the people of India and at that critical juncture appeared Gandhi as a puff of fresh air with his visionary ideas to reform the stagnant Indian society especially the centuries old practice of untouchability. Just at that time a young

man in his prime and driven by a strong desire to reform the Hindu society from its deep slumber writes book showing mirror to the upper caste Hindus of their own misdeeds of utter discrimination of the outcastes. Mulk Raj Anand wrote *Untouchables* when he was only thirty years of age. The narrative of a day's events in the life of Bakha was enough to shake the conscience of the discerning readers worldwide. Bakha, the protagonist, is an untouchable sweeper boy who goes on his daily task of cleaning toilets. He faces the humiliating experience of being hit by an upper caste man for touching him accidentally. He cannot retaliate, outcastes cannot. His sister Sohini's modesty was outraged by the hypocritical priest Pundit Kali Nath. He cannot do anything, not even confront him. While begging food a woman throws bread at him and he had to accept that; severely scolded by the mother of a boy for touching him. To add on to his misfortunes he was driven out of home by an insensitive father. A frustrated and disgusted Bakha meets Colonel Hutchinson, the Padre who offers him an escape from this life of humiliation and degradation by coming into the fold *Yessuh Messih*, to convert to Christianity. Bakha escapes that trap too. He listens to the speech of Mahatma Gandhi who exhorts the untouchables to give up their bad habits and take the path of education. Bakha is inspired by hearing the speech of Mahatma Gandhi. However the intellectual discussion between a young poet and lawyer fills him with a sense of optimism. The young poet predicts that soon a machine would take up the job of the scavengers, flush latrines will eradicate the scourge of manual cleaning of toilets and untouchables will no more remain as untouchables after their profession changes.

Mulk Raj Anand makes scathing attack on the evil practice of untouchability. According to him the mistreatment the outcastes are subjected to makes them alienated. Anand is critical of religion being made a base to discriminate against the untouchables. He also exposes the hypocrisy of the upper caste Hindus who have deprived the outcastes and enjoy all the privileges for themselves. The writer ends the novel on a positive note by making Bakha hope for a future where there is hope that he would not have to remain as a sweeper for the rest of his life.

9.9 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the relevance of the novel *Untouchable* in the present context of Indian society.
2. Present character sketch of Bakha.
3. Prepare a note on the treatment of theme of untouchability in the novel *Untouchability*.
4. Discuss the theme of social alienation in the novel *Untouchable*.
5. Comment on the symbolic significance of Pundit Kali Nath's sexual assault on Sohini.
6. Prepare a note on social realism as represented in the novel *Untouchable*.

9.10 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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