

Chapter Ten

Fear of Pollution

A Study of Humiliation in *Untouchables* by Mulk Raj Anand

Fatima Syeda

Man has always been plagued by the fear of pollution. The idea of avoiding pollution and remaining pure has been an obsession with different communities and social and religious groups in India. *Pavitrata* and *Shudhita*¹ remain as two great ideals forming the very foundation of human existence in Hindu society. Most of the individuals, however, fail to acknowledge the inner filth within them thereby living in a permanent denial of this inward pollution. The hierarchical system which assigns social identity to different social groups helps the upper caste Hindus in placing this unacknowledged filth / pollution on the lowest of the castes who are regarded as untouchables. Such sections of society are further humiliated so as to maintain the distance between the privileged and the pollution they very much fear. In an effort to distance this pollution further, the same fear is inculcated in low castes by rendering them the title of the untouchables who are condemned to live their lives in a constant fear, oppression, guilt, pain and hurt. Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable* registers the mute fury of the untouchables through an analysis of a single day's activities of a sweeper boy Bakha. Narrating the story of Bakha, a representative of the large sections of mankind ousted and condemned to the misery, Mulk Raj Anand unveils the layers of subjugation and humility which an untouchable is wrapped in. Though the focus remains on his helplessness, despair, failing hopes and agony all of which find no outlet, yet the novelist, at no point, fails to record the feeling of uncleanness which all the superiors around Bakha are trying to get rid of. The novel ends on an emphatic note that true purification may only be acquired if one acknowledges the dirt within and without and is ready to cleanse it himself.

Key words: Pollution, Purity, Fear, Humiliation, untouchability.

The Indian society and the life therein are governed by the intricate imbrication of two principal concepts i.e. purity and pollution. The excessive Hindu pride in *Pavitrata* (Purity / cleanliness) has made the Hindus oblivious to the dirt, filth and pollution in and around them created by their own selves. The caste or *varna*² system helps them in dislocating this pollution from their own selves by disowning it. The fear of being regarded unclean or polluted is so hideous that the high-caste Hindus deny any possible association with it. It is for this reason that the pollution has been distanced and removed from the supposedly pure and clean people. *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, *Kshudras*³ form the four principal castes in the Hindu society occupying the cleanest and richest professions according to the hierarchical positions in this caste system. The untouchables, now called Dalits, exist outside or beneath this caste category. They are the lowest of the low and are excluded from the mainstream social life. Dalit, the very name given to these outcastes "means "suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces" "⁴. The Dalits, being helpless and

dependent, are the ones who receive the blame for this pollution disowned by the high caste Hindus. The caste system thus becomes a humiliation inducing system which legitimizes discrimination and hierarchies based on differences. The hypocrisy of this notion attracts the attention of Mulk Raj Anand who in his novel *Untouchable* treats the subject of untouchability through the life story of Bakha, a sweeper and thus one of the untouchables. The “pollution complex”⁵ is unfolded through a series of incidents in the novel in which the untouchables are blamed for being dirty and polluted just because they clean the dirt of others. The irony lies in the fact that it is the cleaners and not the pollutants who are regarded dirty and polluted.

The novel begins with the geographical divide which segregates the colonies of the ones who produce dirt and the ones who clean them. “The outcastes’ colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the Cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them.”⁶ This segregation is a conscious or unconscious effort to disjoint any link between the high castes and the filth they produce. Most of the professions of the people living in these mud houses are to help the high castes to claim their cleanliness. “... the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass-cutters...”⁷ are all whose very services elaborate their roles in society. The scavengers clean their latrines, the leather-workers skin the animals and dry their stinking skins and hides, the washer men wash away the dirt on their clothes, the water carrier carries water for the high-castes to purify themselves etc. In all these respects, it is the outcastes who cleanse and scavenge. It is obvious from the scene described in the very first paragraph that the dirt, filth, human refuse and the hides and skins to be dried to be made into leather and the public latrines, all are situated at the peripheral places and in a domain cut off from the main stream of life where live the other upper class castes. The “... ugliness, the squalor and the misery”⁸ is thus all placed with the outcastes, winning the title of the untouchables for them.

The image of a high-caste Hindu introduced by Anand in the novel is not only ridiculous but also ironic. Havildar Charat Singh, the first high-caste Hindu to appear in the novel, is described as “A small, thin man, naked except for a loincloth, stood outside with a small brass jug in his left hand, a round cotton skull cap on his head, a pair of wooden sandals on his feet, and the apron of his loincloth lifted to his nose.”⁹ Apparently, he is disgusted at the sight and smell of the uncleaned latrines. His prompt response is to blame Bakha for his physical disease. “ ‘Do you know you are responsible for my piles! I caught the contagion sitting on one of those dirty latrines!’ ”¹⁰. The blame game starts with this first allegation and continues to appear again and again in the novel to bring out the irony involved in the way the outcastes are always charged of being filthy and polluted.

The description of Bakha is in direct contrast with Charat Singh who is a small, thin, emaciated man. Bakha is able-bodied and “... his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as a rock when it came into play, seemed to shine forth like glass.”¹¹ It is significant to note that Bakha’s body and actions are compared with natural spring and glass. A natural spring brings forth water which does not only purify others but is pure itself. Another comparison is that of his muscles with a shining glass. Glass is transparent and translucent in nature and excludes any impurity. The deftness, strength and cleanliness manifested in Bakha’s body create confusions in Charat Singh who looks at this untouchable who should be “... as a rule uncouth and unclean” but is may be cleaner than himself. His “painful half an hour in the latrines” seems contrasting with Bakha’s “active participation to the task he had in hand...”¹²

Charat Singh ignores Bakha's distinctive personality and reinforces the age-old traditions of caste system to demean Bakha's position. Bakha's clean appearance posed a threat to his own "... Hindu instinct for immaculate cleanliness". The result was that "he became rather self-conscious, the prejudice of the 'twice born' high-caste Hindu against stink, even though he saw not the slightest suspicion of it on Bakha, rising into his mind." This kind of behavior is the result of what Bakha calls a sort of confidence gained from the "2000 years of racial and caste superiority." Singh's decision to ignore the existence of a 'clean' outcaste sheds light upon his fear of pollution, a feeling which all the high-caste Hindus have in their hearts and minds. The reality is that Bakha himself has been feeling ashamed of the ways the high-caste Hindus have been purifying themselves. The whole performance of performing abolutions meant for purification in itself is disgusting to Bakha who sees the high-castes as "... rinsing their mouths, gargling and spitting noisily into the stream; douching their noses and blowing them furiously, ostentatiously."¹³ This is the true picture of the people who entitle him as unclean and untouchable.

To reinforce the irony behind 'the pollution of touch', almost all of the high-castes are presented as weak, peevish and emaciated beings and all the outcastes as full of energy, action, agility and a queer sort of beauty. The labels are different from what it contains. The outcastes are called polluted and polluting, yet they are all graceful, good, healthy and active. The high-castes, on the other hand, are regarded by caste as clean, yet their bodies are crowded with ugliness, evil, illness and diseases. Lachman, a Hindu water carrier is described as powerful, intelligent and energetic. Sohni, Bakha's sister is young, beautiful and graceful. Bakha, too, has a power of a kind. It is the power of his work which has the ability of purifying his soul. While burning the refuse collected from the latrines, he realizes that "It seemed to infuse into him a masterful instinct somewhat akin to sacrifice, it seemed as if burning and destruction were for him acts of purification." The work gives him a sense of strength, "a wonderful wholeness to his body", and "... a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession and of the sub-human status to which he was born.". This wholeness, nobility, beauty and grace is what lacks in the high-caste Hindus. Havildar Charat Singh is thin, small and ill. Ramanand is a "peevish old bania" with an "emaciated belly" and Pundit Kali Nath is a constipated, "ill-humoured old devil" with a "bony, hollow-cheeked, deeply-furrowed face."¹⁴ The lack of energy, life, beauty and grace is reflective of the morbid and sick condition of their mind as well as body.

The very names of these outcastes are suggestive of the status they have in the society. Their exclusion from the caste system defines their existence which is much the same for everyone among them. Their names, therefore, are not very distinctive in their appeal. Lakha and his two sons have almost similar names, each having only the first syllable different so that it is easy to call each other to duty. Otherwise, Lakha, Bakha or Rakha are all one and the same to the high-castes. Bakha's friend Chota is another diminutive whose position is confirmed by his very name. Ram Charan's name is also significant. The word 'charan' meaning 'feet' defines his status in the society. The names of the women also objectify their utility for the high-castes. Sohni means beautiful and Gulabo means pretty as rose. It is their beauty for which they are used by the high-castes leading to further humiliation which comes out of molesting them. The names of the high-castes, on the other hand, signify their positions. Havildar Charat Singh, Pundit Kali Nath, or Hakim Bhagwan Das, all have distinctive names signifying not only their individual personalities but also their positions in the society.

Pundit Kali Nath, the priest incharge of the temple in the town, is one instance in this regard. As a religious leader of his class, he may be regarded as their representative. He is one of

the many of his class whose soft and finer instincts are "... hardened by the congenital weakness of his body, disillusioned by the congenital weakness of his mind, brazened by the authority he exercised over the faithful and the devout." It is the innocence of Sohni, the so-called polluted one, which stirs these softer and finer instincts in his person. His desire for Sohni is very symbolic. He, as others from his class, yearn for this touch, yet pretend to avoid it on the premise that this touch will contaminate him. The attempts to crush this desire for the touch, the high-castes bully and use harsh words to hide their weaknesses. The same is what happens with Pundit Kali Nath who becomes ready to draw water from the well for the outcastes only to improve his perpetual constipation. The inner turmoil of the rumblings in his belly define his behavior. The inner pollution brings distortion in his behavior. The constipation, for example, in this case brings wrinkles on Kali Nath's face. These wrinkles and frowns are interpreted by the outcastes as his distaste for having to serve them, making them all the more servile, humble and submissive and thereby shameful of their existence. However, it was quite obvious that he is "attempting to cover his weakness by bullying" in this scene. The inner pollution, however, comes out very soon when he gives way to his evil desires of molesting Sohni. The strife between his outer, pure self and the inner dirty self could not hold for long and he gives in to the strong, evil intentions. "And he looked long at her, rather embarrassed, his rigid respectability fighting against the waves of amorousness that had begun to flow in his blood."¹⁵ Though the novel seems to be about the frustrations of the outcastes yet the frustrations seem to be more pronounced and obvious in the case of the high-castes. The apparent hate for the filth around them yields to a stronger desire to behave filthily. The outcastes, on the other hand, are fighting more against the incomprehension of their status and the humiliation they have to face because of this status.

Even the children of the high-caste *babus*¹⁶ know that they have to feign manners and lack of greed, avarice or any other negative value. The two sons of the *babus*, though kind and obliging as their elders, are very well aware of the fact that if there is anything evil or wrong in their minds / hearts, they have to hide it. The elder boy of the high-caste *babu* with the exalted position, had a "strong materialistic instinct" but would never exhibit the same in his behavior. It is for this reason that when Bakha tries to offer him some money for the lessons, he feels attracted to teach Bakha how to read and write. He suppresses his desire for money beneath a hypocritical smile adding at the same time what Anand believes to be "the conventional money lover's phrase: " 'Oh, the money doesn't matter.'"¹⁷ The hypocritical response of the elder boy tells a lot upon the hypocrisy of his elders. Children learn from whatever they see happening around them. Their efforts to hide or cover their materialistic instincts is like any other such desire to evade the pollution within their high-caste elders.

To keep up these appearances, there is a very important need to sustain the servility and humility in the outcastes. Rebati Mohan Sarkar discusses the position of the untouchables as "the ritually sanctioned line of pollution"¹⁸. The ritual demarcation of this line helps to keep the outcastes apart and completely secluded from the mainstream of the society to carry the weight of the pollution rejected and disowned by the high-caste Hindus. The two incidents in which Bakha purchases, a packet of cigarettes and the *jalebis*¹⁹ worth four *anna*²⁰, brings this hypocrisy to a broader view. It is ironic that these high-caste shopkeepers wash the money received from the outcastes for they believe it to be contaminated by their touch. The reality is that the money is contaminated not by the touch of the outcastes but because of the fact that it is not earned rightfully. These shopkeepers take advantage of the age old tradition of untouchability and exploit the poor outcastes by over charging them. The humility, shame and lack of courage in the outcastes help

the cause of the high-castes who know that they cannot argue or question their superiors and thus can be deceived easily. Bakha could not buy most of the sweet delicacies from the confectioner's shop only because he knew that these were not cheap "... certainly not for him, because the shopkeepers always deceived the sweepers and the poor people, charging them much bigger prices, as if to compensate themselves for the pollution they courted by dealing with the outcastes." The use of the word pollution in this citation is very important. The high-castes see the reflection of their own polluted actions of over-charging the poor outcastes whom they make to pay more because of their unclean disposition. The confectioner uses the word 'greedy' for Bakha when he himself deceives the man for money. Bakha remains baffled and unable to dare to complain against the cheating. So clearly defined are the boundaries of the pure and the impure that pollution cannot, in any way, be reported within the pure. Any further doubts are eliminated by the humiliating way in which the confectioner throws the packet of *jalebis* at Bakha "like a cricket ball". Afterwards, when he washes the money given by Bakha, it seems as if he is trying to wash away his own sins for having earned money in this way. Bakha, on the other hand, "walked away, embarrassed yet happy"²¹. Each incident of humiliation ensues a mental state of incomprehension giving way to so many conflicts and questions in the minds of Bakha.

The main incident of the novel i.e. when Bakha is slapped by a high-caste Hindu for contaminating this Hindu with his touch, only increases the number of conflicts and confusions in Bakha's mind. The touched man claims of being polluted by Bakha's touch who is blamed by him for being so absorbed in the scene around him that he fails to warn the high-castes around them of his polluted presence. The filth coming out of the mouth of the supposedly aggrieved high-caste Hindu makes one rethink the very concept of pollution of touch. The touched man calls Bakha a vermin, swine, bow-legged scorpion, dog, brute, son of a bitch, offspring of a pig, dirty dog, a confirmed rogue, careless, irresponsible swine, son of swine and so on and so forth. It is significant to note that this man feels the need to purify himself because he is touched by Bakha, who, being an outcaste, is polluted. The impurity, filth and dirtiness of his language, however, comes so naturally to him that it seems as if it is a constant character of his being and flows directly from his inner polluted self. These abuses are further multiplied by so many other high-castes in the novel, who in an attempt to unburden their dirty selves dirty the outcastes around them. The presence of a sweeper boy provides them with an opportunity to heap upon him all what they do not want to own themselves.

The way these high-caste Hindus form a barrier around Bakha is highly symbolic. They gather around him leaving no space for him to escape the lashing words coming upon him from all directions. He becomes, in this scene, an object for receiving an anger vent out by the evil characters of each of the men in the crowd. Bakha stands tormented surrounded by a crowd of the high-caste members of the society, baffled, at the same time, at the hatred and anger his touch has given way to. Meena Kandasamy, a Dalit poet, brings out the intensity of the hate an outcastes' touch may evoke. In her poem "Touch", she gives expression to the thought that one might have the knowledge of all good and bad things a touch may induce, yet one may never know that touch "When crystallized in caste / Was a paraphernalia of / Undeserving hate."²²

Bakha can, however, not get away from this situation because of the age old traditions which have chained his feet to the ground. Though he fails to understand the reasons for the 'undeserving hate' and his humiliated position in this crowd, yet he conforms to the normative caste rules by being submissive and servile. And though his physique is healthier and stronger than the bony and weak high-caste Hindus surrounding him, yet he cannot push them to run away for

in doing so he may touch and thus pollute them. “But then he realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the onlookers, but a moral one.”²³ Jogdand explores the causes behind owning this impurity which Bakha readily accepts. He says, “It indicates thousands of years of servitude, exploitation and oppression on the basis of collective impurity due to being born in a community of untouchables.”²⁴ Bakha, too, believes like the crowd around him that the “...contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men.”²⁵ This kind of reaction suggests that it is essential for the humiliated ones to feel the insult and the misery with an acceptance of their position in the society. It is only then that their humiliation would become complete. Ashis Nandy comments on this elemental presence of the sense of shame in the humiliated ones by saying that “Unless the humiliated collaborate by feeling humiliated, you cannot humiliate them, however hard you try.”²⁶ Bakha, in this scene, collaborates not only by feeling humiliated but also by being frightened, guilty and shameful of having touched a high-caste member of the society. This is what gives the other party a strange sense of satisfaction and a power over him and his likes.

The whole world shrinks into two signs in this scene, that of the defiler and the defiled. The passive position of the high-caste Hindu, i.e. of being ‘defiled’, is quite ironic in this relationship. The wrath he draws forth seems unnatural, rather artificially provoked. Though Bakha is full of fear, humility and servility, yet the ‘defiled’ man is not satisfied with it. It seems as if he is creating a big drama about his supposedly ‘impure’ status for which he holds Bakha as solely responsible. The incident gives him a chance not only to assert his higher position in the society but also provides him with an opportunity to humiliate the outcaste Bakha to such an extent that he is never again able to raise his head in front of his superiors. Having no strength of true morals, he realizes that “... for the first time for many years he had had an occasion to display his strength.” The incident provides him with a chance to feel powerful in a certain way. “He felt his five foot two frame assume the towering stature of a giant with the false sense of power that the exertion of his will, unopposed against the docile sweeper boy, had called forth.”²⁷ The sense of power which he derives from the situation is as false and fake as the baseless standards of the Hindu caste system. The uncleanness, dirt, and filth that this aggrieved high-caste Hindu blame Bakha with, comes out of cleaning the filth of the same high-caste brethren. Rehati Mohan Sarkar, an Indian anthropologist, explores the “psychological process of projection, in which every class projects the badness and evil within their community on members of the lower castes.”²⁸ What makes many of the members of the high-caste Hindus to gather around Bakha to watch the fun and take “... a sort of sadistic delight in watching him (Bakha) cower under the abuses and curses of its spokesman”²⁹. The whole experience is so reassuring of their pure status in the society that it seems to provide some sort of strength to them and also an opportunity to overcome a bit of what Nandy calls “a crippling fear of losing control” over the class whom they have been blaming for their own pollution. He further says that for the high-castes “Humiliating Dalits is a means of avoiding that status loss and the resulting humiliation.”³⁰ It is, therefore, to avoid humiliation that the high-castes humiliate and thus confirm their superior position.

It becomes difficult to surmise whether it is the polluted touch which enrages the ‘defiled’ man or the fact that Bakha was moving around as free as he and the people of his class. “He walked like a Lat sahib, like a Laften Gornor!” shouted the defiled one. ‘just think, folks, think of the enormity!’³¹ It is true that people like Bakha are reduced to such a state that an experience of walking as a free man in the streets is an enormous experience for them, yet the fact that this

enormity enrages the high-castes to such an extent, reflects the mental states of the high-castes. A humiliated life is essentialized for the outcastes because it is only in this way that the high-castes are able to maintain their status of purity and superiority. Kailash Tuli, in his essay “Humiliation in the Indian Context” discusses the effects of humiliation. He reinforces, “The personality of the humiliated person is dehumanized while the one who humiliates gets a feeling of control, power and to a great extent aggressive or tormentor kind of supremacy.”³² The more humiliated, crushed and suppressed the low-castes are, the more removed they will be from the mainstream of the society. Bakha’s touch has endangered this maintenance of distance and is likely to erase or shorten the distances among different castes if forgiven easily. It becomes essential for the ‘defiled’ man then to teach Bakha a lesson which will be remembered by Bakha as well as the other outcastes. The humiliation needs to be stamped on Bakha’s face so that never does he forget his class or social status. The “sharp, clear slap” brings him to his ‘real place’ and “quite automatically he begins to shout: “ ‘Posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!’ ”. Out of the confusions of the conflicting questions in his mind, one clear idea dawns upon him and he comes to realize that “For them I am a sweeper__ untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an untouchable!”³³ He keeps on repeating the words lest he forgets them.

The realization of having a polluting touch makes Bakha think about the regard which a cow or a bull receive in a Hindu society. A careless, ruminating bull sitting in front of a shop makes him to think of the luxurious status it enjoys in a caste based society. He sees a well-dressed rich Hindu coming to the bull to “touch the animal with his forefingers.”³⁴ The fact that the cow dung and the urine has a purifying quality and can cancel his own polluted touch, enrages and frustrates Bakha to a frightening extent. The idea that the Hindus would worship a stinking bull but will not touch a human being is weird as well as dehumanizing. Jogdand Yashpal relates a similar kind of experience in his article “Humiliated by Caste” in which he tells that even the animals were allowed to drink water from the wells but the Dalits were not allowed to touch the water for their touch was even more polluted than the animals. Jogdand says, “The dehumanizing message of this custom clearly indicated that Dalits are worse off than four legged animals. This was denial of human identity. It violates the sense of value and rights one naturally expects on the basis of being human. One of the most important emotional consequences of this identity denial is feeling of humiliation.”³⁵ This denial of human identity is the worst kind of humiliation that an outcaste ever faces.

The instances of humiliation get multiplied as the story of Bakha’s one day’s activities move on. He and his sister Sohni are humiliated, again to hide and cover the impure, corrupt and polluted deeds of the high-castes, in this case the priests and the worshipers in the shrine of Hanuman. Based on his experiences of the day, Bakha has very well “... realized that an untouchable going into a temple [may] pollute it past purification”. So frightening is the sense of being regarded impure and unclean that he hesitates to enter, or even see from a distance the morning prayers going on in the temple. His pure, humble and natural love and respect for a god unknown to him can be viewed as in contrast to the superficiality of the high-caste Brahmin priests and the worshipers in the temple. His unseen and most probably unacknowledged prayer is disturbed by a priest of the temple who was “...racing up the courtyard, trembling, stumbling, tottering, falling, with his arms lifted in the air, and in his mouth the hushed cry “ ‘Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!’ ”. The repeated cries of the priest on being polluted again are an attempt to displace the pollution of his own filthy desires upon the outcastes who have taken up the

responsibility to sweep off the filth of their high-caste brothers. This priest, who has been raked with the desire to touch Sohni, complains of being “defiled by contact” of the same girl. The fakeness of his purity is, however, brought out when Sohni tells Bakha the reality of what had happened between her and the priest. She tells Bakha, “ ‘That man, that man,...that man made suggestions to me, when I was cleaning the lavatory of his house there. And when I screamed, he came out shouting that he had been defiled.’ ”³⁶ This incident is a very clear example of how these high-castes, so fearful of acknowledging their polluted selves, blame the lowest of the classes with the same. The worse their sin, the more contaminating the touch of the outcastes become. In this way, they are bonded in a strange kind of relationship in which one carries the image of the pollution of the other.

The priest laments the impoverishment of his position by telling the people in the temple: “ ‘You people have only being polluted from a distance,’ Bakha heard the little priest shriek. ‘I have been defiled by contact.’ ” The people who had come to pray to the god in the temple lament with an equally intensive remorse, “We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine.”³⁷ Here, a reference is made to the two kinds of pollution which an untouchable may evoke. E. M. Forster in his preface to Anand’s novel *Untouchable* refers to these two kinds of pollution as “ ‘pollution by touch’ and ‘pollution from a distance’ ”³⁸. So it is not just the touch of the outcastes but also their shadow which should be avoided to proclaim a purity.

In this instance also, it becomes difficult to guess whether the priest is frustrated upon being polluted or for not being able to fulfill his evil designs. “But I...I...” shouted the lanky priest histrionically, and never finished his sentence.” No one, however, questions him for whatever he has done. “The crowd on the temple steps believed that he has suffered most grievously and sympathized.” For Bakha, it becomes difficult to digest the hypocrisy of the high-castes. He enrages and flares wildly, yet is restrained by the hate of the crowd who withdraw with each of his advancing steps, hence his status of untouchability. “Bakha stopped still in his determined advance when he saw the crowd fly back.” The “hypocrisy of it” makes his blood boil with anger and helplessness. He can now see beneath the claims of purity made by these Brahmins. He realizes that “This man, a Brahmin, he lies and accuses me of polluting him, after __ father of fathers, I hope he didn’t violate my sister.”³⁹ The lack of a god for an outcaste to pray is quite visible in the above quoted sentence. Qammer Abbas Anka analyses the conditions of the outcastes who are “impoverished and excluded, abused and humiliated, denied justice, exploited and untouchable.” in his opinion. This makes him ask a question “... are they children of a lesser god?”⁴⁰ Bakha invokes ‘fathers of fathers’ in this scene instead of appealing to one of the gods of the high-castes. It is ironic also because his forefathers are also the ones who have been clinging to the age old traditions of the caste system. Lakha says at one point in the novel that “... the religion which was good enough for his forefathers was good enough for him.”⁴¹ The very source from which Bakha seeks strength in this prayer, is the one which has been acting to solidify his weak and subordinating position in the society.

The whole scene acquires the quality of an orgy, a ritual performed. A ritual of transferring the impurity and pollution of one social group upon another. The excitement of the people in the temple is the same as it was in the case of the crowd on the road. “The crowd above him took the cue and shouted after him, waving their hands, some in fear, others in anger, but all in a terrible orgy of excitement.”⁴² For this crowd also, the incident is more of an opportunity to make a lot of fuss about their self-presumed purity and the reinforcement of the placement of their pollution on

the already miserable outcastes. The movement of both the parties is quite symbolic in this scene. First, Bakha rushes and runs with his sister followed by a surging crowd. Later, when he advances threateningly towards the same crowd, they fly back. The movement creates a rhythmic effect with one group of people moving back, the other moving forth and then vice versa. The fact that the surging crowd retrieves on seeing Bakha moving towards them is quite painful for they fear him not because of his powerful body but because of his polluting touch. They simply shrink from him feeling disgusted at being so close to him.

The scene is coldly watched by the gods, the “magnificent sculptures” who “seemed vast and fearful and oppressive”. The effect created by the vision of these gods is so intimidating that Bakha becomes fully frightened. The gods, however, fail to assist him for they were not his gods. They, instead, simply kept on staring at him while looking hard, with ogling eyes, ten arms and five heads. The magnitude of the towering gods of the high-castes infuse weakness in him and he, support-less and alone acquiesced to his weak and helpless existence. This helplessness, however, makes him realize some more facts which he initially learnt from the slap which he received from a high-caste Hindu on road early in the morning. Whereas the first experience dawned upon him the reality of his status in the society, the second experience makes him aware of the hypocrisy of the high-castes around him. His inability to do anything, against the insults both he and his sister have received at the hands of the high-castes, reflect upon his person as a “... futility written upon his face”. The institutionalized system of *varnas* is so firmly established that it has become impossible to eradicate it. He realizes that “He could not overstep the barriers which the conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weakness against him. He could not invade the magic circle which protects a priest from attack by anybody, especially by a low-caste man.” The realization does not come easy upon him for it ensures and confirms his already diminutive status in the society around him. He laments not only the established traditions and conventions but also the magic woven around them whose spell cannot be broken by a common man. All his energy, strength, positivity strike against these forces, get hit and bounce back to hit him harder. Anand writes, “So in the highest moment of his strength, the slave in him asserted itself, and he lapsed back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances.”⁴³ This is how he goes on burying his resentment against a caste system that deprive him the most.

The third round of his humiliation makes his misery complete. His touch has already contaminated the people on road and the people in the temple of Hanuman. The third episode reflects how people avoid the shadow of the untouchable upon their houses. Bakha, soon, finds out that he has contaminated a house by sitting upon its door step. The moment the woman of the house discovers this fact, she starts cursing Bakha, “...may the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence. May you perish and die! You have defiled my house!”⁴⁴ The defilement does not come out of her mistreatment of Bakha but out of his sitting at her doorstep. It is ironic that the woman who respects and feeds the *Sadhu*⁴⁵ for being a man of god, shuns and humiliates another man of god. Qammer Abbas Anka’s question seems quite relevant here. The *sadhu* is given respect which Bakha is denied because Bakha is perhaps the child of ‘a lesser god’. Bakha remains baffled when “the woman’s tone had changed from kindness to the holy man to cruelty to him.” Her shallow approach towards religion is brought out by the way she mistreats Bakha. She too, like the people on the road and the crowd in the temple, is full of the fear of pollution which may infest her life as well as her religion. She too, like them, blames Bakha for the defilement: “You have denied my religion!... Now I will have to sprinkle holy water all over the house.”⁴⁶ By charging the outcastes with this pollution, the high-castes actually console their own selves

establishing a belief that the external agencies are responsible for the pollution and by removing them and by performing the cleansing ritual, they and their houses will be purified of the filth of any sort. Kailash Tuli writes about the ugliness that the caste system has acquired. The satisfaction and pleasure derived out of humiliating the outcastes reminds him of a German term. “This kind of culturally approved behavior is somewhat akin to German term, ‘schadenfreude’ in which pleasure is derived from the misfortune of others.”⁴⁷ The woman in the novel, too, seems to derive pleasure out of insulting Bakha and looks rather agitated by the idea that the sweepers may have some self-respect. She complains, “You sweepers have lifted your heads to the sky nowadays.” Later on, when Bakha leaves her blocked drain unattended, she says, “ ‘Aren’t they a superior lot these days!’ ... They are getting more and more uppish”⁴⁸. The binary pact inter relating the two social groups, i.e. of the humiliated and the ones who humiliates, is important in terms of maintaining the master-slave relationship they have. Ashis Nandy notes that “Humiliation dissolves when the dyadic bonding - and the culture that scaffolds it – is disowned by at least one of the two sides.”⁴⁹ Self-respect must be denied to the sweepers for they may rise to a position which may help them shake off all the heaps of pollutions they are burdened with.

Bakha points out that even if they were careful enough not to touch them, the high-castes would still humiliate and ill treat them. So it is not merely the ‘touch’ of the outcastes but a whole philosophy of touchability behind such behaviours. Untouchability is thus an outcome of an attitude on the part of a whole class of people whose interests it serves. *Navsargan*, a Dalit organization, gives out, “Untouchability is prompted by the spirit of social aggression and the belief in purity and pollution that characterizes casteism.”⁵⁰ Bakha tells his father that “They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt.” He explains this to his father with the help of an example. “That pundit in the temple tried to molest Sohni and then came shouting: “Polluted, polluted.” The only answer Lakha could provide to Bakha’s precise examination of their position is “a smile of impotent rage.”⁵¹ Theirs is not the position from which the perspective of the people may be changed. They can simply receive the rejection, pain and humiliation which does only reinforce their already confirmed and demarcated subordination. Nandita Sengupta writes about the humiliation received by the outcaste women and talk about the instances where “older Dalit women also attempt to explain rape as “tradition” ”⁵². Lakha has a very clear realization of this fact and it is for this reason that Bakha’s protest of being mistreated only evokes a fear in him which “... was mixed with that servile humility of his which could never entertain the prospect of retaliation against the high-caste men.”⁵³ *Navsargan* registers the fact that “The person treated as untouchable submits himself or herself to untouchability practices because of a generational integrated belief that it is right, justified, religious and natural.”⁵⁴ All the established institutions in the society affirm and re-affirm the inferior position of the outcastes, a position which is secured and guarded so that the high-castes can acquire a purity of conscience and body. Most exploited of all these institutions is religion. It is commonly believed by all the castes that religion disallows the touch of the outcastes. Lakha tells his son, “We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us.” Religion is used here not only to render a superior status to the high-castes but also to implicate a deep sense of inferiority and “the docile acceptance of the laws of fate”⁵⁵ by them.

For Bakha, this realization does not come that easy. He wants to fight back. He wants to shake off the roots of the conventional system of castes which ensures their depravity in all respects. Kailash Tuli’s list of the symptoms of the humiliated people matches Bakha’s condition in this novel:

- Causing self-devaluation and extreme sense of rejection in mind and body
- Extreme sense of dejection and mistrust
- Feeling of worthlessness in one's personal life
- Sense of social isolation and dejection
- Getting pushed down to the underdog role
- Sense of being treated unfairly, with hostility and dejection.
- Causing mental scars that may never disappear from the psyche⁵⁶

Bakha's character can be seen as experiencing all of these symptoms. But the reality is that his rage, anger, frustration and the resultant despair, all boil down to nothing more than a realization voiced by him as "Horrible, horrible."⁵⁷, a cry made out by his soul. The very words remind one of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, which explores the nuances of the process of colonization and thus an exploitation of another kind. Kurtz, in this novel, plays the god of the black Africans who are made to believe in their inherited inferiority of being from a race which earns a status, only of subjugation. The last words of Kurtz, their white master and their demi-god are "The horror! The horror!" which encapsulate the evil and darkness of the whole experience where one class of human beings was oppressed, dehumanized and exploited by another group of people only because of their colour. The last stare of Kurtz says it all, the futility, the uselessness of all the hatred directed towards the exploited ones during his life span. Marlow describes this last stare as a "___stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe"⁵⁸. This condemnation and loathing is for a world which divides human beings into different categories. In both the novels, the concept of exploitation done on the basis of differences is shown as resulting in horror, sickness and ugliness.

The distinctive position of being an outcaste is so pronounced and regarded so shameful that Bakha is always ashamed of being conspicuous. He shies away from attention and never does he want to be noticed by anyone. He always becomes so conscious on being seen that it seems as if his very existence is what he is ashamed of. A few moments in the novel when he seemed to be a bit forgetful of himself and his station are the most beautiful moments of the day for him. Once when he is eating the *jalebis* and the other when he dreams sitting and sleeping at the doorsteps of the woman who was supposed to give him food for the day. Both events end horribly, reminding him of his true status in the society. In the first incident, he is humiliated, abused, cursed, and slapped. In the second one, he is again cursed, condemned and insulted in the worst possible way. His food is literally thrown on a gutter for him to pick it from there. Both the incidents teach him the lesson of not ever letting himself forget his status of untouchability. He buys himself a pack of cigarettes and sees the shopkeeper shrinking away from him and then *jalebis* of worth four *annas* again to receive a similar treatment from the confectioner. It is the result of such incidents that he starts thinking of melting away into nothingness at the slightest notion of being seen by a high-caste. And it is for this very reason that when he enters Charat Singh's place, he is too conscious of being seen by any one: "... he seemed to have dwarfed himself to the littlest little being on earth."⁵⁹ His response to a little kindness from Havildar Charat Singh is very awkward. He feels his fate changing because of the kindness shown to him by Charat Singh. For instance, he cannot believe his ears when Charat Singh asks him to bring coals from his kitchen. The honour done to Bakha is double fold here. First, he is allowed to touch Singh's hubble-bubble and second that he is allowed to enter the kitchen of a high-caste. He is so over-awed that he goes on and picks the burning coals with his bare hands, reflecting the extremity of happiness and gratitude on receiving such a great honour.

Charat Singh's kindness leaves Bakha wonderstruck and highly obliged. The irony of the situation is brought to the fore when the inner workings of Bakha's mind are revealed. Bakha's humiliation is so complete that little acts of kindness from people lead him to be so grateful that he becomes ready to lay his life for them. For people like Charat Singh, such acts which they occasionally indulge themselves into, raise their stature in the eyes of the already suppressed and distanced class of the untouchables. For instance, in receiving a hockey from Charat Singh, "Bakha bent his head and evaded the Havildar's eyes. He couldn't look at so generous a person." The act dwarfs him further and he is more than embarrassed. "He was overcome by the man's kindness. He was grateful, grateful, haltingly grateful, falteringly grateful, stumblingly grateful, so grateful that he didn't know how he could walk the ten yards to the corner to be out of the sight of his benevolent and generous host." At another point, he becomes so obliged to Mahatma Gandhi for sympathizing with his fellow outcastes, that he becomes ready to serve Gandhi for the rest of his life. "He adored the man. He felt he could put his life in his hands and ask him to do what he liked with it. For him he would do anything."⁶⁰ The system of *varnas* is so grounded in the Hindu society that not only the outcastes acquiesce to the maltreatment they receive at the hands of the high-castes but also do they regard the high-castes as divine beings if they condescend to be kind to the outcastes.

The kindness shown by people like Bakha, however, has different results. Bakha rather receives curses when he rescues the little son of the *babu*. The little boy was seriously injured after being hit by a big stone on his head. In Bakha's sincere effort to save the boy, he forgets about his untouchable status. He, however, is very soon reminded of the same by the boy's mother. She curses him, "Vay, eater of your masters, vay dirty sweeper! She shouted. 'What have you done to my son?'" Even when she has seen her boy bleeding, she does not for a moment forget the unbearable presence of an untouchable at her home. " 'You have defiled my house, besides wounding my son! ... May you die! ...'"⁶¹ The abuse, the curse, and the charges of having wounded the boy, all make him completely miserable. Tuli discusses the evils of caste system and says, "It is debasing, insulting, terrifying and depression inducing."⁶² The fact that his touch pollutes gnaws at Bakha's heart. He reflects, "I only get abuse and derision wherever I go. Pollution, pollution, I do nothing else but pollute people. They all say only: 'Polluted, polluted!'" All his kindness and affection for the boy is infested by his polluting touch. He laments the barriers which separate him from the rest of the mankind. He recognizes these barriers when he becomes a part of the crowd which was rushing to see the Mahatma Gandhi. "He was part of a consciousness which he could share and yet not understand. He had been lifted from the gutter, through the barriers of space to partake of a life which was his, and yet not his. He was in the midst of humanity which included him in its folds, and yet debarred him from entering into a sentient, living, quivering contact with it."⁶³ This lack of contact is quite problematic for Bakha for it segregates him from the mainstream of humanity.

Gandhi is the only one in the novel who rejects the idea of untouchability being associated with religion. He, from his very childhood, believed in the notion that "... untouchability was not sanctioned by religion and that it was impossible that it should be so." He rather considers it to be "satanic"⁶⁴ to nurture or even practice such ideas. Tuli quote Gandhi in his article, "It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow being."⁶⁵ One of the possible ways of eradicating untouchability as a practice is to allow and train people from all castes to clean and scavenge. The issue can be resolved only if one recognizes the basic responsibility to clean one's own pollution. In this way, each person would be the cleaner as

well as the cleaned one himself. The eighteen year old Brahmin boy in Gandhi's ashram believes in scavenging himself. Besides being a religious person "... he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had also become a perfect sweeper."⁶⁶ The perfection comes only with the complete acceptance of a responsibility for one's life.

Labelling the cleaners as pollutants does not solve the problem. It rather accentuates it. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the sweepers are "cleaning Hindu society". They are cleansing and purifying the society and need to be regarded for this service. Another solution comes from the poet who finds it easy to reject the very foundation of caste systems. "The old, mechanical formulas of our lives must go; the old, stereotyped forms must give place to a new dynamic." He laments the Indian ideologies which depend too much on touchability and blood. He says, "We Indians live so deeply in our contacts; we are so acutely aware of our bloodstream...". The futility of such beliefs needs much to be realized and result in a re-vegetation of the caste system. He says, "As it is, caste is an intellectual aristocracy, based on the conceits of the pundits,..."⁶⁷. This conceit needs to be deciphered properly, re-conceived and finally reborn to provide an environment where there is no need to humiliate one particular class to ease the fear of pollution which drives the high-caste in distancing the outcastes by naming them as untouchables. Instead of fearing pollution, if people start acknowledging it within themselves, they will be no more afraid of it and the life thereafter would be as it was once envisioned by Rabindranath Tagore in one of his poems "Where the mind is without fear". Tagore, in this poem, dreams of a world in which all may live a life of dignity, where knowledge is free to all and "Where the world has not been / Broken up into fragments by narrow / Domestic walls"⁶⁸. The essentials of a free and healthy life are, according to this poem, knowledge, human dignity, self-respect, fearlessness, courage, and a humiliation-free casteless society. To get rid of the humiliating concept of untouchability, therefore, one has to get rid of the humiliation inducing caste system and its roots buried deep in the fear of pollution.

End Notes

-
- ¹ Purity and immaculateness
 - ² Caste
 - ³ The four main categories in the Hindu caste system
 - ⁴ Jogdand, 2012, p. 4.
 - ⁵ Forster, 2014 , p. 4.
 - ⁶ Anand, 2014, p. 7.
 - ⁷ Ibid, p. 7.
 - ⁸ Ibid.
 - ⁹ Ibid. p.12
 - ¹⁰ Ibid.
 - ¹¹ Ibid.
 - ¹² Ibid.
 - ¹³ Ibid. p.12-14.
 - ¹⁴ Ibid. 15, 16, 21.
 - ¹⁵ Ibid. 23-24.
 - ¹⁶ Men belonging to high caste and high position in Hindu society
 - ¹⁷ Anand, 2014, p. 32.
 - ¹⁸ Sarkar, 2006, p. 36.
 - ¹⁹ A kind of traditional sweet meat
 - ²⁰ A currency valid in those days. A rupee has sixteen (16) annas.
 - ²¹ Anand, 2014, p.37.
 - ²² Kandasamy, 2012, p. 54.
 - ²³ Anand, 2014, p.39.
 - ²⁴ Jogdand, 2012, p. 3.
 - ²⁵ Anand, 2014, p. 39.
 - ²⁶ Nandy,2011, p.261.
 - ²⁷ Anand, 2014, 40.
 - ²⁸ Sarkar, 2006, p.2.
 - ²⁹ Anand, 2014, p.40.
 - ³⁰ Nandy, 2011, p.272.
 - ³¹ Anand, 2014, p. 39.
 - ³² Tuli, 2010, p. 2.
 - ³³ Anand, 2014, p. 40, 41, 42.
 - ³⁴ Ibid. p.43.
 - ³⁵ Jogdand, 2012, p. 3.
 - ³⁶ Anand, 2014, p. 47, 49, 50.
 - ³⁷ Ibid. p. 50.
 - ³⁸ Forster, 2014, p. xii.
 - ³⁹ Anand, 2014, p. 50, 51.
 - ⁴⁰ Anka, 2016, n.pag.
 - ⁴¹ Anand, 2014, p. 100.
 - ⁴² Ibid. p. 50.
 - ⁴³ Ibid. p. 51, 52, 53.
 - ⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 58.
 - ⁴⁵ A Holy Man
 - ⁴⁶ Anand, 2014, p. 58.
 - ⁴⁷ Tuli, 2010, p. 3.
 - ⁴⁸ Anand, 2014, p. 58, 60.
 - ⁴⁹ Nandy, 2011, p. 274.

-
- ⁵⁰ *Navsargan*, 2008-9. n.pag.
⁵¹ Anand, 2014, p. 64.
⁵² Sengupta, 2009, n.pag.
⁵³ Anand, 2014, p. 64.
⁵⁴ *Navsargan*, 2008-9, n.pag.
⁵⁵ Anand, 2014, p. 67.
⁵⁶ Tuli, 2010, p. 2.
⁵⁷ Anand, 2014, p. 80.
⁵⁸ Conrad, 1977, p. 106.
⁵⁹ Anand, 2014, p. 88.
⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 88, 120.
⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 94
⁶² Tuli, 2010, p. 2.
⁶³ Anand, 2014, p. 94, 112.
⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 119, 120.
⁶⁵ Tuli, 2010, p. 3.
⁶⁶ Anand, 2014, p. 120.
⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 120, 126.
⁶⁸ Tagore, 2004, n.pag.

Works Cited

- Anand, Mulk Raj. *Classic Mulk Raj Anand: Untouchable, Coolie, Private Life of an Indian Prince*. Ed. Saros Cowswajee. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2014. Print
- Anka, Qammer Abbas. "Dalits __ Children of a Lesser god in India". *International, The News*. Feb 13, 2016. Web. 5 April 2016.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977. Print
- Forster. E. M. "Preface". *Classic Mulk Raj Anand: Untouchable, Coolie, Private Life of an Indian Prince*. Ed. Saros Cowswajee. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2014. Print.
- Jogdand, Yashpal. "Humiliated by Caste: Understanding Emotional Consequences of Identity Denial". *School of Psychology and Neuroscience*. University of St Andrews, Scotland, U.K., 2012. Web. 5 April 2016.
- Kandasamy, Meena. "Touch". *Classic Poetry Series: Meena Kandasamy: 50 Poems. PoemHunter.com. The World's Poetry Archive*. 2012. Web. 15 April 2016.
- Nandy, Ashis. "Humiliation: The Politics and Cultural Psychology of the Limits of Human Degradation". *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. Print
- Navsarjan. "What is 'Untouchability'?" *Navsarjan*. 2008-09. Web. 5 April 2016.
- Sarkar, Rebati Mohan. *Dalit in India: Past and Present*. New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2006. Print
- Sengupta, Nandita. "Dalit Women more Humiliated when Raped: Study." *The Times of India*. New Delhi, Dec 15, 2009. Web. 5 April 2016.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. "Where the mind is Without Fear". *PoemHunter.com*. January 1, 2004. Web. 15 April 2016.
- Tuli, Kailash. "Humiliation in the Indian Context: Effectiveness of Zeitgeist to Inculcate Human Dignity." *IILM Institution for Higher Education*. April 2010. Web. 15 April 2016.