

Bakha's Identity Dilemma in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: An Exploration of Dalit Psychology

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Abstract

The Indian English-language writer Mulk Raj Anand depicts psychological crises of the subaltern through the character of Bakha in his masterpiece, *Untouchable* (1935). He attempts to portray the psychological vulnerability of the outcasts of society through the depiction of the Dalit community. This study explores the true nature of Dalit psychology through discussing Bakha's equivocal status as a result of social discrimination and racial binary. It analyses the multifaceted dominations that the so-called elite class imposes on the subordinates who have taken these appalling social conditions for granted. Although not drawn from Dalit literature, a theoretical and critical reading reveals that William Shakespeare's Shylock, Othello, and Caliban, Emily Bronte's Heathcliff, Khaled Hosseini's Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab bear significant resemblance to Bakha in terms of identity confusion. Using analytical methods drawn from post-colonialism and psychoanalysis, this article seeks to discuss Bakha's psyche as a representation of the plight of the oppressed and Dalit people.

Keywords

Dalit, untouchable, Dalit psychology, racial binary, identity confusion

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) believes that human beings are the ultimate proprietors of their societies and searches for an equitable and progressive India, devoid of social evils perpetrated in the name of religion, customs, and traditions. His creation Bakha represents the universal outcry of Dalit people around the

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world, specifically the identity crises of Indian subaltern population. Bakha is not merely a human figure in an Indian colonial and racial setting; he is an embodiment of the scream of the Dalits who are always plagued with an inferiority complex. In light of Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), this paper investigates the influence of powerful people on the psychology of the marginalised. It delves into the complexities of the Dalit identity dilemma which is exacerbated by society's religious boundaries and unjust rituals. To explore the dynamics of Dalit psychology, this article bases its discussion on *Untouchable* and explicates themes like the caste system, dual identity, inferiority complex, and the snobbery of the higher social classes by applying the constructs and theories of mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, psychoanalysis, and post-colonialism.

Exploited and psychologically broken, the Dalits belong to the lowest caste and are deprived of basic human rights. They are the *Avarna* people in the Hindu *Varna* system or caste-based social stratification. That is to say, they do not belong to any of the four Hindu castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, or Shudras. They are considered untouchables and polluted in the indiscriminate *Varna* system of the Hindu religion. The oppressed and marginalised Hindu communities are referred to as Scheduled Castes in article 341 of the Indian Constitution. Similarly, in article 342, the oppressed and diasporic tribal people are referred to as Scheduled Tribes. The Dalits are known as Bhangis (sweepers), Harijans, untouchables, and outcastes who are compelled to engage in menial labour. There are multiple Dalit communities in different countries of the world. The table below lists some of them:

Table 1: Dalits around the World

Countries	Dalit Communities
India	Harijans, Dalits, Scheduled Castes
Nepal	Dalit, Badi
Pakistan	Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Dalit
Bangladesh	Dalit, Muchi, Mazi, Kasai, Mali, Darji, Hajam, Dholak, Bede, Hijra, Bihari, etc.
Sri Lanka	Dalits
Japan	Buraku
Yemen	Muhamasheen, Al-Akhdam, Al-Muhamasheen

African countries	Osu (Nigeria), Borana (Kenya), Sab (Somalia)
Source: The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)	

Bakha, the protagonist of Anand's novel, is the representative of all down-trodden people in pre-independence India. He is a universal figure at the receiving end of oppression, injustice, and humiliation. He symbolises the hardships and humiliation that the Dalits in India encounter as a result of their lower social status (Amudha 210). His identity dilemma is acute throughout the novel *Untouchable* since he is subjected to hatred and racial discrimination. Through the presentation of Bakha, Anand has described the miserable fate of the Dalits who undergo numerous forms of injustice and mistreatment in society. Sunmugam et al. have described how the caste system and colonialism have contributed to the complication of Dalit identity in contemporary society. The nature of people's jobs, therefore, defines their caste and identity in society as higher, lower, or untouchable (Sunmugam et al. 206). The disadvantaged, downtrodden, and untouchable communities are presented as less prestigious, underprivileged, polluted, illiterate, and uncivilised and are detached from the upper class (Sunmugam et al. 209). Domination is one of the mentionable themes in the novel that deals with different types of exploitation—social, economic, political, cultural, religious, and sexual (Jayasri & Reddy 13).

There are cultural differences between India and the Western world. When Bakha is subjected to cultural discrimination by members of his community, he becomes fascinated by, and turns to, Western culture. Bhabha argues that “the signs of cultural difference cannot then be unitary or individual forms of identity because their continual implication in other symbolic systems always leaves them ‘incomplete’ or open to cultural translation” (313). Bakha wants to get relief from the Hindu caste system and social insecurity and seeks refuge in the British lifestyle. When his national cultural identity fails to provide him with social justice and security, he deconstructs the concept of “Indianness” to expose the negative practices of Indian culture that incorporate certain unacceptable values, customs, and sentiments (McMonagle 34). Bakha's national culture generates identity uncertainty and psychological trauma among its minor citizens.

The Dalits are deprived of fundamental rights such as food, clothing, habitation, health, and education (Simamora et al. 33). Such marginalised communities are oppressed in different ways and do not have equal access to educational institutions, playgrounds, religious places, wells, streets, shops, and healthcare centres (Simamora et al. 36). They are not allowed to enter the temple because their presence supposedly pollutes the ‘sacred’ place. Because of this

pollution complex, they are unable to take water from wells used by members of the upper castes. Numerous justifications are given in support of the caste system in the modern world as well. It reinforces the division of labour among people in society as if there is nothing wrong with this division of labour (Ambedkar 20). The plight of the Dalits is made worse by inhumane religious rituals. The Hindu religion adheres to certain rituals, beliefs, and ideals as well as an anti-social spirit that perpetuates caste divisions (28). Thus, religious ideologies create divisions among people, and the Dalits suffer considerably as a result of unjust religious norms.

According to Sawariya, the Dalits are mentally depressed and discrimination in society gradually makes them vulnerable and afraid (199). Jadhav et al. have conducted a survey of Dalit individuals in several Indian states and have found that caste prejudice has both psychological and cultural consequences. The stigma of untouchable identity impacts the inner psyche of the Dalits who are excluded from everyday social life.

Bakha and the Indian caste system

Anand has efficiently outlined the cruel scenario of racial hatred and caste complex in the Hindu religion. Bakha is a victim of this social custom which has traumatised his mental stability. He encounters restrictions from society and its people due to his lower-class identity. As the narrator in *Untouchable* says: “These old Hindus were cruel. He was a sweeper, he knew, but he could not consciously accept that fact” (31). The caste system brings psychological suffering to Bakha, and he is unwilling to accept the system that creates binaries and divisions in society and culture. The prevalent caste system deprives him of going to school, playing, and socialising with others beyond his Bhangi community, as his father warned him saying, “schools were meant for babus, not for the lowly sweepers.... He was a sweeper’s son and could never be a babu” (Anand 30). Bakha has been subjected to negligence since childhood, and several questions arise in his innocent mind about his birth as an untouchable child, his job, fate, and social structure. Bakha’s psychological suffering intensifies his identity crisis as he is not satisfied with his position, and this leads to hatred and negligence of his own community. The readers can feel his inner agony: “For them I am a sweeper, sweeper—untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable!” (Anand 43). Bakha himself also despises his profession due to the maltreatment of others.

The Hindu religion, as depicted in *Untouchable*, creates social divides and acts as an ideological state apparatus (ISA) which can be oppressive. Physical contact with the Dalits is a sin according to the Hindu *Shastras* (scriptures) even though hypocritical priests often molest Dalit women. In the story, Pandit Kali Nath is such hypocrite who utters “Polluted! polluted!” (Anand 53) when Bakha puts his footstep on the temple stairs. However, this same faux pundit attempts

to molest Bakha's sister, Sohini, forgetting the religious *Shastras*. What Ambedkar says in this regard is worth mentioning:

The profession of a Hindu priest is the only profession which is not subject to any code. Mentally a priest can be an idiot, physically a priest may be suffering from a foul disease, such as syphilis or gonorrhoea. Morally he may be a wreck. But he is fit to officiate at solemn ceremonies, to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* of a Hindu temple and worship the Hindu God. (75)

Though these religious swindlers show that they are ardent followers of religion, ethics, rituals, and the caste system; but they do not hesitate to molest women of lower castes. The situation is still the same since sexual exploitation of Dalit women and girls has increased significantly in India during the Covid-19 pandemic ("Dalit women and girls"). It seems that Dalit women are legitimate sexual targets of upper caste people. In most cases, violence against them remains unrevealed and unreported and justice is rarely ensured ("Dalit women and girls"). Bama's novel *Karukku* (2012) also portrays the miserable condition of Dalit women in a patriarchal and caste-based society. Because of poverty and hunger, they are compelled to conduct all kinds of filthy jobs to serve the upper castes. Dalit women are subjected to sexual abuse and exploited by the upper castes at workstations and homes as well.

Bakha hopes that a sense of humanity will eradicate discrimination from society and bring some solace to the Dalits. He questions the hypocrisy of pseudo-religious preachers who use false categorizations to cause social chaos and conflict. He learns from a priest that the merciful Jesus Christ regards Brahmin and Bhangi as the same. However, when the same priest's wife chastises her husband for having the black sweeper Bakha with him, it raises questions in Bakha's mind regarding Christianity. If the priest's wife believes in racism, then how can he become a preacher of a religion that believes in equality and mercy? Bakha wants a massive change in the existing religious systems.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to uproot untouchability from society by changing the nature of the cleaning profession. Gandhi's statement is explored by Anand that the untouchables are basically cleaning up the Hindu religion and society but others are unable to accept it (138). Ambedkar, however, adds a different view emphasising the importance of taking some socio-political steps to eradicate the caste system in society. He refers to the Hindu religious *Shastras* as the source of the predicaments of this caste system (26). The upper-class Hindu communities consider their rituals and beliefs sacred, whereas the Dalits are treated as minors, which reinforces India's social and religious taboo of untouchability. So the caste system which creates an inhuman racial boundary to dominate others is to be totally abolished.

Inferiority complex and ambivalent identity

Anand has concentrated on caste divisions and the psychology of the lower-class people who are victims of the caste system of Hinduism. Bakha has encountered class domination and prejudice in his religion. Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions in which the caste system has been very prevalent, generating identity confusion among lower caste people. This crisis is palpable in Bakha who is not satisfied with his social standing because social hierarchy continues to have a strong influence on identity consciousness. Fanon has described how the difference among races creates a "psycho-existential complex" among people (14). It happens in Bakha's case too, as he is a victim of local prejudice and colonial racism. A person may find themselves in an inferiority complex and "thrust into a neurotic situation" when a society maintains the superiority of a particular race or group (Fanon 100). Discrimination in religion and culture among people of the same religion causes immense suffering for members of the lower castes in India that has sustained the caste system. Besides, the native Indians faced social and cultural domination because of the presence of the British colonisers and the newly established rules. The Dalits are puzzled and confused about their cultural identity due to this dual domination. They suffer from a superior-inferior complex that can be defined as follows:

The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: it is the racist who creates his inferior. (Fanon 93)

Bakha's over-enthusiasm for British clothes and way of life causes him to suffer from an existential predicament. As a member of the Dalit community, his experiences have contributed to his traumatic psychological condition. Similarly, all the lower caste people are abused psychologically, socially, and culturally.

Bhabha employs the terms 'mimicry,' 'ambivalence,' and 'hybridity' to describe the condition of the natives who always try to imitate their so-called self-announced master. People sometimes try to copy Western culture, religion, accent, dress, food habits, walking style, etc. But they are inherently habituated to those of their indigenous culture. They cannot completely mimic other cultures, so they are stuck in an ambivalent status where they are in between the other culture and their own culture. The natives are unable to imitate the master but they continuously try consciously or subconsciously to do so. Bhabha argues that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other" and "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence" (126). This imitation has a significant psychological impact on the Dalits who are victims of the social class system. These people remain ambivalent and vulnerable like Bakha who is always busy with himself looking like a sahib or white (British) government official.

When people lose their cultural identity and try to incorporate other identities, they gradually lose their originality. This situation generates "illusions

and misunderstandings that only a psychological analysis can place and define” (Fanon 85). The coloniser’s culture influences the colonised psyche in such a way that the natives willingly accept the putative cultural superiority of the coloniser. Bakha always desires to play with a hockey stick and wants to wear clothes, preferably suits, to look polished like the aristocrats. At the same time, he becomes fascinated by the English language and culture. His ambivalent condition is voiced through these lines:

He had been told they were sahibs, superior people. He had felt that to put on their clothes made one a sahib too. So he tried to copy them in everything, to copy them as well as he could in the exigencies of his peculiarly Indian circumstances. (Anand 3)

The downtrodden constantly attempt to prove their worth by adopting a dominant lifestyle and culture to gain identity and social standing. Bakha finds it difficult to fully follow them and, at times, to retain his own cultural values. He is in a double-coded condition, attempting to reclaim a new identity from the past. Bakha’s own religion does not provide him with honour, identity, or prestige; and thus he develops fascination for the culture of the sahib. The way of life of the upper class may not always be acceptable to the natives who cannot pass their judgement due to their social condition, as Anand illustrates through Bakha’s words:

But he himself had been ashamed at the sight of Tommies running naked to their tub baths. ‘Disgraceful’, he had said to himself. They were, however, sahibs. Whatever they did was fashun [fashion]. (11)

The sahibs call the native Indians *kala admi* (black person) and dislike their ablution system. Ironically, the sahibs also do things that are disliked by the natives, but this sentiment remains unexpressed because the former are the rulers. The oppressor often cannot understand the sentiments and nature of the “oppressed nation and its culture” (Fanon 190). The colonised person is compelled to admit his cultural inferiority and to “recognize the unreality of his ‘nation’ and in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure” (Fanon 190). The discriminatory attitudes of the coloniser force people to feel inferior psychologically and to mimic others, making them ambivalent and hybrid.

Double colonisation of the Dalits

When the Dalits try to copy either the colonial masters or the native upper caste people, they receive mockery from both. When the so-called upper class faces single colonisation, they become hybrid in their attempt to imitate the coloniser, whereas the Dalits confront twofold colonisation and become comical in their attempt to imitate those who occupy higher social positions. People living under colonial rule and to what extent their psychology is influenced by their colonial masters have been discussed by Bhabha:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilising mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. (127)

The colonisers are successful in establishing their influence on the colonised psyche and in changing their cultural heritage using social racism, division, and hatred. In this process, the Dalits face dual domination in a racial and colonial society.

The coloniser considers the natives of other lands ‘savage,’ ‘barbarian,’ ‘uncivilised,’ etc. and want to Westernise those people as part of their civilising mission. Similarly, the upper castes of India also maintain the same ideology of the we-they binary and separate their habitations from the abodes of the Dalits. In the Indian caste system, upper-class Hindus consider themselves superior to the Dalits, which is similar to the Orient-Occident dichotomy. The Dalits cannot touch the upper caste people and they live in a different colony known as the outcastes’ colony. Anand says: “There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and the outcasts from Hindu society” (1). The misery of the outcastes is beyond description. The Dalits have to maintain both the colonial rules as well as the rules set by the upper castes. Anand illustrates this situation both as an Indian and as an observer of the caste system. As Forster testifies:

Untouchable could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. (Preface to *Untouchable* vii)

Anand discusses class struggle and the caste system which are two major problems in India. The caste system is prevalent in Hinduism and different castes exist within the same religion. Thus, people are oppressed by this divide and rule system. Members of the untouchable class are always in fear because of this dominant racial hatred. Their psychological suffering worsens, given their miserable state of life and the privileged lifestyle of the aristocrats. Moreover, the colonial rule creates terror in the natives’ minds and it also creates an ever-tormenting ambivalence as evident in Bakha. Thus, the Dalits confront two forms of domination in society—colonial domination and caste prejudice.

Spivak has mentioned a variety of groups including dominant foreign, dominant indigenous on a national level, dominant indigenous on regional and local levels, subaltern classes, etc. that “represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the elite” (284). She poses an important question of whether or not the subaltern or dominated group has the right to raise their voice. Bakha expresses his frustration with the unjust social system and utters in agony: “They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt” (Anand 70). Bakha is a witness to the continuous oppression, hatred, racism, and class distinctions prevalent in society. In his

preface to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha mentions lines from Prakash Jadhav, a Dalit poet who writes:

Hey, ma, tell me my religion. Who am I?

What am I? (xxiv)

A similar kind of agony is observed in Bakha who also suffers from the same identity dilemma. He thinks about Hinduism and Christianity but is unable to understand which religion accepts members of the ‘Bhangi’ community as equal human beings. He also questions the gods in temples since they cannot annihilate the caste system.

Manifestations of Dalit psychology

The Dalits are underprivileged communities deprived of all kinds of social, political, economic, religious, cultural, educational, and healthcare rights as citizens of a country. Born and brought up into the Mahar caste, one of the untouchable castes in India, B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was the pioneer in establishing the rights of the Dalits. The cobblers, the scavengers, the bohemians, the chandalas, the chamars, and the tribals are still considered untouchables, minors, and outcastes in most South Asian countries. In post-independence India, although several human and social rights have been ensured in the Indian Constitution, there is still discrimination; and social fundamental rights are not equally established. India’s discriminative medical facilities severely affect Dalits’ health. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the marginalised groups have become the worst sufferers of unequal healthcare service in India since they are deprived of healthcare facilities (“Inequality Report 2021”). Ambedkar asserts that Marxism, liberal humanism, bourgeois humanism, republicanism, and other ideologies cannot bring any change to the fate of the untouchables. All of these grand ideas and ‘isms’ fail to provide any solution to the problems of the underprivileged people (Mokshagundam). The social and religious boundaries do not allow Dalits to interact with the upper castes since there is a restriction of *pollution-complexity* for them. Inter-marriage, inter-dining, inter-playing, inter-schooling, and inter-worshipping are prohibited for them. Though Anand is a member of the (upper) Kshatriya caste, given his liberal upbringing, he had the opportunity to play with the sweeper boys and observed their sufferings very closely.

In colonial India, the Dalits encountered double discrimination—the dogmatic attitude of the high caste and the colonial mistreatment of white racism. After independence, the constitution announced the social privileges of the untouchables. In articles 15 and 17 of the Indian Constitution, untouchability and racism had been abolished (Badge 28). It annihilated untouchability but there is no practical implementation of this constitutional law. India fails to secure the human rights of the Dalits who experience social degradation throughout their life. However, many Dalits change their religion to get rid of this social prejudice, yet, in most cases, their previous Dalit identity continues to haunt them. Thus,

there are Muslim, Christian, and Sikh Dalits besides Hindu ones (Badge 27). They are the victims of deeply rooted social rituals and man-made unjust laws. Their identity seems to be determined by the existing class consciousness of the Hindu community and the rules of the Hindu *Shastras*.

The fear and sufferings of Bakha and his community raise the feeling of the uncanny, which refers to frightening objects that remind us of familiar things (Freud 220). Bakha is aware that his community is the neglected one, yet he feels distressed when he comes across similar negligence and oppression. According to Freud, the uncanny is the mark of the return of the repressed (245). In Anand's representation, Bakha is found unintentionally touching a man while walking on the road and is punished because he does not warn the man of his coming by uttering, "posh posh sweeper coming" (44). The man shouts at him saying, "Ohe, you son of a dog!" (40), "careless, irresponsible swine" (41), and so on. His food item, jalebi, falls from his hand after being slapped by that man. It becomes more heart-touching as he is hungry and about to eat it. In another episode, Bakha sits on the doorstep of a Brahmin woman who scolds him saying, "You eater of your masters" (63), "May you die" (64) for polluting that house. In a different scene, Bakha gets humiliated in the temple by the worshippers and the priest with the words, "Get off the steps, you scavenger!" (53). He cannot play with other children because of this pollution complex. If he touches the babu's children, they become polluted. Similar happenings recur, and these create uncanny feelings in him. Though he is familiar with this hatred and oppression, he becomes traumatised each time he faces those situations. Bakha's father, Lakha cannot protest due to this fear of pollution-complex and he does not allow Bakha to protest either stating, "They are our superiors" (71) and later "They are our masters" (71). Thus, the submissive Dalits accept the fact that they are born as outcastes and have to die as outcastes because of their inferior identity.

Marginalised people are often instilled with a sense of violence and courage to protest against the established constructs as a result of continuous repression and oppression. Thiong'o's characterizations of Wanja, Munira, Karega, and Abdullah in *Petals of Blood* are worth mentioning here. These characters protest against injustice and oppression through constructive violence. In addition, in a short film, the character Nangeli rebels against the existing caste system and the restrictions imposed upon lower caste women who must pay tax to have their breasts covered, otherwise, they must expose their breasts publicly. Nangeli, a Dalit woman, protests against this discriminatory ritual by cutting her breasts and giving those to the rule makers as breast tax (*Mulakaram-The Breast Tax*). Anand's young protagonist, Bakha also wants to rebel against the Pandit of the temple but he is unable to do so partly because of his father's warning.

The traumatised psyche of the marginalised

The identity crisis of the Dalits has been observed in different writings, films, documentaries, and reports represented by writers and human rights activists over time. It is evident that the sufferings of these people are ceaseless and they enjoy trifling benefits from society. They have to succumb to the powerful sections of society, often in terms of their body, status, money, land, and service. Thus, lower status, ambivalent identity, and lack of belongingness are the constant scenarios that remind us of Shakespeare's (1564-1616) universal characterizations of Shylock (a Jew in *The Merchant of Venice* [1600]), Othello (a Moor in *Othello* [1603]), Caliban (represented as a half-human being and beast-like character in *The Tempest* [1611]), Emily Bronte's Heathcliff (a Moor and an orphan in *Wuthering Heights* [1847]), and Khaled Hosseini's Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab (Hazaras in *The Kite Runner* [2003]). Shylock is humiliated because of his *Jewish* identity which eventually makes him revengeful. Similarly, Othello undergoes an inferiority complex for his Moorish identity and Caliban receives domination due to his beast-like features. Thus, Shakespeare depicts the issue of racism to represent the theme of oppression towards the marginalised section. Bronte's Heathcliff also suffers from a racial complex having a black complexion and a *Moorish* orphan identity. In Hosseini's work, Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab were deceived, neglected, tortured, and traumatized due to their *Hazara* identity. All of these characters undergo similar psychological trauma like Bakha who continuously suffers because of social stratification and the pollution complex.

Social discrimination of the 21st century has been depicted in a Bangladeshi drama, *Sweeper Man* (2001) in which the so-called gentlemen cannot accept the fact that a sweeper's daughter can be taught in the same school with their children. It shows that a couple of sweepers have to hide their identities to send their daughter to a good school. Socially imposed hatred and negligence make people feel inferior and later violent and revengeful as observed in the cases of Shylock, Othello, Caliban, and Heathcliff. Society raises a sense of inferiority complex among them and they turn into psychologically fragile people. The Othello syndrome and Heathcliff's psychological abnormalities are the outcomes of this social racism.

Omprakash Valmiki depicts the social exploitation of the Dalits since his *Chuhra* community was oppressed by the upper caste *Tyagas*. For survival, the Indian Dalits had to consume *joothan* (leftovers) of the upper castes. Valmiki foreshadows the picture of society's maltreatment of them as if Dalit children, pigs, and dogs live in a parallel way. The caste system is a conspiracy to trap people in the "whirlpool of inferiority" (Valmiki 33). He portrays optimism through a progressive shift of fate by being educated with great efforts, hardships, and struggles. Bakha also struggles for his survival and wants a positive change to the outcastes' fates. In the preface to *Karukku*, Bama expresses her agony by saying: "There are dalit hearts like mine" (xiii). She observes the ill-treatment of the upper caste towards the Dalits and questions society and its rule-makers: "Are

Dalits not human beings” (Bama 24)? Similarly, Valmiki exposes his inner turmoil, asking: “Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are the Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits” (41)? These Indian writers are the true observers of the caste complex as they belong to the Dalit community. The Dalits undergo true suffering but their stories always remain unconcerned and clandestine. Later, several writers such as Ambedkar, Valmiki, and Bama started narrating their experiences to inform the whole world about the unjust laws and social prejudices of the Hindu caste system. Similarly, notable for his portrayal of the sufferings of the poorer castes in his writings, Anand, presents the miserable fate of the untouchables.

There are several minority communities all over the world and most of those people are oppressed physically and psychologically. Still, in the twenty-first century, minority groups are being oppressed. The Uyghur Muslims, the Rohingya Muslims, and the Black minorities are textbook examples of ethnic cleansing and genocide. There are many incidents of black people being harassed, strangled, and killed by law enforcement agencies in developed countries. The incident with George Floyd in the United States and his utterance, “I can’t breathe” is an example of the exploitation of black people (Okri). These marginalised people who experience oppression in society are similar to the Dalits. Racism divides people and oppresses them in every possible way. The table below presents worldwide Dalits who suffer from social domination, prejudices, and negligence due to their lower-class identity:

Table 2: Worldwide Dalits and their professions

Countries	Number of Dalits	Nature of profession and discrimination
India	201 million	Forced prostitution, manual scavenging, forced and bonded labour, Devadasi and Jogini systems
Nepal	5 million	Agricultural labour, forced prostitution
Pakistan	2 million	Agriculture and brick making, forced religious conversion, sexual abuse, abduction
Bangladesh	3.5-5.5 million	Street sweeping, manual scavenging, and burying the dead; they hold almost no official positions and are excluded from political participation, community development, and employment
Sri Lanka	4-5 million	Cleaning of toilets and garbage collection, tea plantation workers
Japan	6 million	Butchering animals or tanning leather
Yemen	0.5-3.5 million	Sweeping, collecting plastics, or begging, lack of access to housing, employment, education, and basic social services, and exclusion from mainstream society

African countries (Senegal, Nigeria, Mauritania, Niger, Mali Kenya, Somalia)	Not found	Racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination, caste-based discrimination, social exclusion, segregation and mistreatment, discrimination in employment and marriage, caste-based slavery
UK	0.25 million	Pupil-on-pupil bullying, discrimination in worship, religion and politics, violence, and public harassment
Source: The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)		

It has been observed that the lifestyle, nature of profession, and social prejudices against Dalits are almost identical everywhere.

Conclusion

Bakha is a spokesperson of all Dalit communities whose identities are constantly in flux since people like him suffer from social inferiority and identity dilemma as a result of double domination. The identity confusion leads him to a vulnerable condition and he always tries to find a way to get out of it. Anand has successfully portrayed the traumatised child psyche originating from the heinous caste system, racial hatred, elite hierarchy, and white supremacism. Bakha wants to be content with his religion, race, class, social position, and job, but the entrenched social divide does not allow him to be so. It constantly reminds him of so-called untouchability, the source of agony and identity crisis for Bakha in particular, and the Dalits in general.

In this transient life, it is important that we have compassion and tolerance for fellow human beings. Unfortunately, those in power use their authority to manipulate others and stall positive changes in society. It is the hypocrisy of the vested interests that engenders and sustains racism, hatred, and class disparity in society to exploit the deprived. The untouchables are still excluded and isolated beings who are yet to receive equal human dignity and rights, as unjust racial binaries and restrictions spoil social harmony and tear down the psychological stability of the oppressed class.

We all need to work to transform this planet into an inclusive place where equity and freedom will prevail. We share one planet and the Dalits are not aliens here. The caste system and blind rituals deprive them of all facilities and compel them to live in deplorable conditions, which is the cause of their mental suffering. This world could have been free from binaries and boundaries since nature treats everyone equally, as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown.

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