

## Episteme of Endurance: Anand's Primal Motivations in *Untouchable*

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But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

St. Matthew 24: 13

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) has commonly been examined in the light of the Hindu caste system in India, and the novel's protagonist Bakha has customarily been treated as a victim of the upper class Hindus for his birth in an untouchable community.<sup>2</sup> Written much earlier to the Second World War and India's independence in 1947, *Untouchable* still remains popular with present readers due to the never abating caste politics in post-independence India. Hence, most critics gloss the sad plight of Bakha under a "politically correct" perspective to arouse sympathy for the lower caste community, generate a gruelling sense of guilt among the high caste Hindus, and solicit justice for the untouchables from the beneficiaries of the caste system. Intoxicated with empathy for the poor, these commentators blissfully overlook the implicit authorial intention in the novel. A re-reading of *Untouchable* in view of the post-war extremity theories indicates that Anand endeavours more to extricate the lower caste people from their inferiority complex with a bold projection of Bakha than to merely expose the pathetic nature of their predicament under the high caste Hindu dominance. This paper attempts to analyse Bakha's primal potentials in the light of the protective manoeuvres later made by protagonists in several post-war European and

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<sup>2</sup>For instance, Kamal D. Verma sees in Bakha "an innocent victim of the old Indian tradition of casteism" (28); Shaileshwar Sati Prasad finds him an embodiment of Anand's reactionary ideals, "By an untouchable his hero Anand is sharply reacting against the age old concept of caste of which Bakha is a victim" (31); and Marlene Fisher considers Bakha's victimhood as eternal, "Bakha is an untouchable by birth, and so is he doomed to remain" (26).

American novels while facing similar inhuman circumstances. Thereby, the paper reassesses the character of Bakha through a close consideration of his instinctive responses for endurance in the context of survival strategies later employed by protagonists in the post-war fictions of extremity.

According to George Steiner, the extreme situations such as the Holocaust and the Labour Camps prevailed in Europe due to the great *ennui* resulting from “the decay of natural religious forms” (46). A similar decadence seems to have struck the Indian situation, which Anand exposes in *Untouchable*, specifically through the Hindu priest’s outrageous attempt to molest the sweeper girl Sohini in the temple premises (52-53). Here, I do not at all intend to generalise the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust or belittle the sufferings of the people in the Russian labour camps. However, the two cases bear certain *incidental* similarities, especially in their physical and spiritual infliction and in the protective measures taken by their respective victims, which indeed call for a comparative investigation. As an example, Jews were massacred in Europe merely because they were *Jews*, and African Americans were discriminated in America simply because they were *black*. In India, Bakha is a victim of similar *apartheid*; he is persistently and randomly tortured to no end by the upper caste Hindus only because of his *birth* in a lower caste family. Moreover, he seems to assume postures for self-protection similar to the prison inmates in Russia and the camp survivors in Germany.

Bakha’s existence in the outcasts’ colony anticipates Shukhov’s condition in a Russian labour camp in Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), Yakov Bok’s captivity in a Russian prison in Malamud’s *The Fixer* (1966), and Eliezer’s crisis in a Nazi concentration camp in Wiesel’s *Night* (1958). Shukhov survives “A splitting frost! Not a warm corner, not a spark of fire!” (51). Eliezer withstands “the thirst, the pestilential stench, the suffocating lack of air” (37), and he wears “old torn coats, rags. For us this was the true equality: nakedness. Shivering with cold” (46). For him, “The days were like nights, and the nights left the dregs of their darkness in our souls” (111). Similarly, Bok resists a “terrible incarceration, no end in sight?” (139). Like them, Bakha is caught into an *extreme* condition of cruelty, cold, hunger, thirst, filth, and foulness; it may be likened to circumstances in the Russian prisons and Nazi concentration camps until after the Second World War. Bulashah is a closed world with “winding, irregular streets lined on each side with shops, covered with canvas or jute awnings and topped by domed balconies” (35). Here, Bakha lives on the outskirts with a host of other untouchables: “The taint of the dark, narrow, dingy little prison cells of their one-roomed homes lurked in them, however, in the out door air” (27). He seems to be “a true child of the outcasts’ colony where there are no drains, no light, no water; of the marshland where people live among the latrines of the townsmen, and in the stink of their own dung scattered about here, there and everywhere; of the world where the day is dark as the night and the night pitch dark” (75). The untouchables’ ghetto gives out the same stink as later smelt by the prisoners of the concentration camp in Halina Birenbaum’s *Hope is the Last to*

*Die* (1971): in the barracks at night “buckets of excrement stood in a little passage by the exit. There were not enough. By dawn, the whole floor was awash with urine and faeces. We carried the filth about the hut on our feet, the stench made people faint” (226).

The upper caste people in Bulashah are apathetic, aggressive, intolerant and cruel due to their superior status in society. They act as the Kapos or SS guards of the barbed moral barricades around the town and assault the defaulters mercilessly to protect their superiority. The echoes of their barbaric behaviour are later heard in the camp guards’ treatment of Shukhov while scrubbing the filthy floor: “‘That’s the way the scum wash.... They do not know how to do a fucking thing and don’t want to learn. They are not worth the bread we give them. We ought to feed them on shit’” (15). Similarly, the Kapos in *Night* torment Eliezer on his way to the bone breaking work: “‘You shut your trap, you filthy swine, or I’ll squash you right now. You would have done better to have hanged yourselves where you were than come here’” (41). The camp guards even make an “excremental assault” on the inmates and beat or kill them at the slightest provocation. Explaining the motivation behind such maltreatment of the inmates, Des Pres observes, “The death of the soul was aimed at. It was to be accomplished by terror and privation, but first of all by a relentless assault on the [inmate’s] sense of purity and worth. Excremental attack, the physical inducement of disgust and self-loathing, was a principal weapon” (60). On the fateful day Bakha awakes a little late because he “shivered with the cold at night.... These nights were awful. So cold and uncomfortable!” (4). Even before he is out of his bed in the freezing morning, someone yells from outside, “‘Oh, Bakhya! Oh, Bakhya! Oh, you scoundrel of a sweeper’s son! Come and clear a latrine for me!’ someone shouted from without” (7). Then as the sweeper boy walks out, the army Havildar Charat Singh bitterly scolds him for not doing his job properly: “‘Why aren’t the latrines clean, you rogue of a Bakhe! There is not one fit to go near!’” (7). The Havildar’s contemptuous belligerence, “‘Oh, you scoundrel of a sweeper’s son!’” metaphorically amounts to an excremental battery on Bakha as the latter immediately plunges into cleaning the overloaded latrines. But hell is let loose when he later bumps by mistake into an upper caste Hindu merchant in the market place. The merchant retorts no less cruelly than the guards in a Russian prison or in a Nazi concentration camp: “‘The dirty dog bumped right into me! So unmindfully do these sons of bitches [untouchables] walk in the streets. He was walking along without the slightest effort at announcing his approach, the swine’” (39). Another caste Hindu reacts in support promptly, “‘Yes, yes, I know,’ chimed in a seedy old fellow, ‘I don’t know what the *kalijugs* [dark period] of this age is coming to!’” (40). The defiled merchant then gives Bakha a sharp slap and returns home to wash himself clean.

The filthy conditions and foul smell fill the camp victims with self-revulsion and consequently they soon surrender to their victimisers without much resistance. After the soul sickens, the body quickens to death. The camp guards look down upon the prisoners with hatred and behave arrogantly with them. They act contrary to the

inmates' interests and wear clean clothes to look neat in contrast to the inmates in dirty dresses. The guards walk on the smooth tract and make the prisoners run side by side on a muddy road to prey upon the weaker ones. They eat well and give very little to the interns after long hours of hard work. Camp survivor Lewinska records in *Twenty Months at Auschwitz* (1968): "They had condemned us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface our vestige of humanity, to return us to the level of wild animals, to fill us with horror and contempt toward ourselves and our fellows" (42). What the camp guards practice consciously to control or kill the inmates seems to be *innate* in the routine behaviour of the upper caste people in Bulashah. Everyday Bakha undergoes similar soul-breaking tortures at the hands of the townsfolk who inflict on him severe physical, moral and spiritual injuries while keeping him subject to hunger, humiliation, dirt and deprivation. In the colony, Bakha's father showers demeaning abuses on him (2, 5, 68), his younger brother ridicules him for not being favourite with his father (75-76) and his friends mock at him for aping the Englishmen (26-28). In the town, he walks on the dirty footpath fearing the forbidden touch with the upper caste people; gets very little food even after long hours of hard work (66); suffers public humiliation from the high class Hindus (39-42); the temple priest Kali Nath attempts to molest his sister Sohini (52-56); the rich woman flings the bread to him from the top of her house (65), and the babu's wife hurls insulting reproaches on him for defiling her injured son (106-7). For such abusive treatment, Bakha feels "the most excruciating mental pain he had ever felt in his body" (89). Consequently, he detests his profession of a scavenger and dreams like the camp prisoners of a free life. Contemptuously, he declares to his father: "... I won't go down to the town again. I have done with this job" (70). Soon he symbolically breaks "away from home, his father, his brother, his sister, everyone" (77) and barges on a romantic journey to visit Ram Charan's sister for the last time on the occasion of her marriage.

Bakha is the "vehicle of a life force" (75) or the "force of that biological expedient in him which, in his race across the stream of life, was sweeping everything out of its course" (74). His outer appearance corroborates his inner strength and steadiness; he looks like a pagan god transcendent of all spiritual ugliness: "His dark face, round and solid and exquisitely well defined, lit with a queer sort of beauty. The toil of the body had built up for him a very fine physique. It seemed to suit him, to give a homogeneity, a wonderful wholeness to his body, so that you could turn round and say: 'Here is a man'" (12). Like Hemingway's Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), he shows early in his life "what a man can do and what a man endures" (73). Actually, Bakha's capacity to endure comes under a severe test when his sub-human existential condition creates a stifling sense of non-being and a nagging fear of death in him. Such fear is peculiar to a young boy with no education or philosophical ruminations. It becomes evident for the first time when Bakha looks at the corpse in the funeral procession: "Bakha stared at it and felt for a moment the grim fear of death, a fear akin to the terror of meeting a snake or a thief" (33). It surfaces again as he ruminates before buying *jalebis* (sweets) in the market with the little money at his

disposal: “‘Eight annas in my pocket,’ he said to himself, ‘dare I buy some sweets,’ he thought and hesitated, ‘but come, I have only one life to live,’ he said to himself, ‘let me taste of the sweets; who knows, tomorrow I may be no more’” (36).

However, he fights it back with his full force for self-preservation like the camp inmates in extremity. The camp prisoners, reminisces an inmate from Treblinka, lived through the extreme conditions of life because of “an intangible quality, not particular to educated or sophisticated people. Anyone might have it. It’s perhaps best described as an overriding thirst – perhaps, too, a *talent* for life, and a faith in life” (Sereny 183). The talent for life puts the human body, spirit and mind into a “protective mode” when confronted with an extreme situation. One outstretches one’s survival instincts to the utmost and makes, consciously or unconsciously, matching manoeuvres to prevail over it. These measures are *generally* automatic in the case of “uncivilised” persons and deliberate in the case of educated people. They emanate in the time of crisis from the hidden strength and innate ingenuity, which are naturally built into the body mechanism from birth. According to Des Pres, it is “something other and greater than the personal ego, a reservoir of strength and resource which in extremity becomes active and is felt as the deeper foundation of selfhood” (192). For that reason, “even eight years as a convict hadn’t turned [Shukhov] into a jackal – and the longer he spent at the camp the stronger he made himself” (126). Likewise, the young Eliezer and his old father slowly become “stronger than cold or hunger, stronger than the shots and the desire to die...” (99). Similarly, Bakha endures the “endless age of woe and suffering” (40), keeping his violent emotions completely under control. In his savage body, he carries a rich treasure of elemental skills: “His wealth of unconscious experience, however, was extraordinary. It was a kind of crude sense of the world, in the round, such as the peasant who can do the job has, while the laboratory agriculturist is scratching his head, or like the Arab seaman who sails the seas in a small boat and casually determines his direction by the position of the sun, or like the beggar singer who recites an epic from door to door” (85).

With his natural inheritance, Bakha goes into the primal gear against utter dejection and numinous fear of non-being. He acts as “pure instinct” – “nature’s natural” or “noble savage” – to save him from dehumanisation and death in a hostile society and an unhealthy climate. According to Hoxie Fairchild, “a Noble Savage is any free or wild being who draws directly from nature virtues which raise doubts as to the value of civilization” (2). Bakha precisely does the same, sustaining himself on the primal sources of energy such as fire (13), laughter (28), sleep (65), the sun (101), and sports (104). He relies on his savage instinct to prevail safely over the unsavoury conditions in a so-called civilised society. For that reason, Anand compares him with a tiger (26), lion (85) and elephant (83), which live by the impulse. On the contrary, the upper caste people curse him as a pig (5), dog (39), swine (41) and bull (57), which act by the instinct. Besides, Bakha himself occasionally acts as “the young and healthy animal” (74) to keep inviolate his life, morality and sanity. Bakha’s primal behaviour becomes overtly noticeable from his occasional regression into childhood (35, 77, 84)

and his compulsive love for children (29, 102) – the two natural embodiments of pure instinct (105) and pristine energy (103). Bakha actually regresses to regain “the wild, careless, dauntless freedom of the child” (93), which he has lost with the growth of years. Commenting on such reversal, in his psychoanalytic study of camp inmates, Hoppe says that people at times respond to an extreme situation by regression into “pre-oedipal stages” or “childlike” or “infantile” behaviour (77). For instance, Bok in the Kieve prison often seeks his parents like a child for help, “‘Mama-Papa,’ he cried, ‘save me’” (166); and Eliezer in Auschwitz says, “It was a nightmare.... Soon I should wake with a start, my heart pounding, and find myself in the bedroom of my childhood, among my books” (43).

Whereas the inmates exhibit their regression into childhood through their desire for eating and defecating, Bakha evidences it in his longing for food and love for children. Such regressive impulse can be seen in two other prominent post-war American novels where the protagonists feel weak and vulnerable in a time of crisis, without the child in or around them. Hemingway’s Santiago badly misses the boy Manolin during his fierce fight with the marlin (64). The boy stands for the primal force, which supplies animate creatures the necessary strength and skill to overcome a critical situation and to facilitate the free flow of life. Likewise, Bellow’s well-educated protagonist in *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), Eugene Henderson, develops a sense of non-being and threatens to kill himself and others due to the death of his primal instincts while living in “civilised” America. He goes away for a therapeutic sojourn in dark Africa, the primordial bed of humanity, to retrieve his primal essence with the help of the African King Dahfu. The tribal king makes him act like a child and play with a lioness to revive his primitive instincts. Thereafter, Henderson returns home with a lion cub and an adopted orphan child, which together symbolise his newly acquired will for a new start. Towards the novel’s end, Henderson feels “fit to live” again and becomes eager to “know how it will be now that the sleep is burst...” (312). Similarly, Bakha finds a pristine joy in his contact with children and with his own childhood. Abject dependence of the camp prisoners on the authorities creates a childlike situation, which induces regression to infantile behaviour. In such circumstances, “It is no wonder that their obedience became unquestioning, that they did not revolt, that they could not ‘hate’ their masters” (Elkins 122). Likewise, Bakha has lived in complete dependence on the upper caste Hindus right from his childhood. Hence he does not rebel against them and endures all inflictions silently like an obedient child or a loyal animal. Even as the priest attempts to sexually molest his sister, he does not “overstep the barriers, which the conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weakness against him.... 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” (56).

Bakha’s reversal to the child-like states saves him from the dehumanising effects of his perpetual engagement with dirt, dung and human defecation. It facilitates his participation in the daily affairs of life and thereby to relate his untouchable self to

the collective Bulashah society. Bakha's self-affirmation against his opponents transforms his anxiety of non-being into what Paul Tillich calls, "the courage to be": "Self-affirmation, if it is done in spite of the threat of non-being, is the courage to be. But it is not the courage to be as oneself; it is the courage to be as a part" (89). For this reason, Bakha goes out to work in the town despite his strong unwillingness to do it. He forgets the pain of his profession and flows with the current of life in the main market. These blissful moments breed in him an infantile enchantment with the colourful objects displayed in the shops. "There was the inquisitiveness of the child in his stare, absorbed in the skill of a woodcutter and there in the manipulation of a sewing-machine by a tailor. 'Wonderful! Wonderful!' his instinct seemed to say, in response to the sights familiar to him and yet new" (35). Next he catches the sight of *jalebis* "so lushly, expensively smothered in syrup" (37); and like a child, he gets tempted to buy them from the meagre money in his pocket. Food gives a strange mystical joy and a strong desire for life in the circumstances of scarcity and extremity. As Des Pres suggests, everything in extremity "depends upon the mysterious strength of bone and blood" in conjunction with the will of the spirit (9). Eating food therefore becomes a daily ritual for the camp prisoners to sublimate their fatigue and to sustain their primal urge for life.

Des Pres further observes that, "To eat becomes a ritualized experience in which resurrection of bodily joy... becomes the physical ground of faith in the value of life" (12). Hence, Yakov Bok relishes his ration for the resurgence of his sagging will to live: "After the bread he ate the gruel, sucking each barley as it melted in his mouth. At night he worked every spoonful of soup over his tongue, each pulpy cabbage bit and thread of meat, taking it in very small sips and swallows, at the end scraping the bowl with his blackened spoon" (178). Likewise, Shukhov blissfully "drank the broth, drank and drank. As it went down, filling his whole body with warmth, all his guts began to flutter inside him at their meeting with the stew. Gooood!... And now [he] complained about nothing: neither about the length of his stretch, nor about the length of the day, nor about their swiping another Sunday" (121). Bakha eats the *jalebis* with an equal joy and passion before bumping into the merchant: "His mouth was watering. He unfolded the paper in which the *jalebis* were wrapped and put a piece hastily in his mouth. The taste of the warm and sweet syrup was satisfying and delightful. He attacked the packet again. It was nice to fill one's mouth, he felt, because only then could you feel the full savour of the thing. It was wonderful to walk along like that, munching and looking at all the sights" (37-38). Contrastingly, the absence of healthy food abates the will to live, which manifests through sickness and a wish for death. On one occasion, when Yakov is not served palatable food, he "forced himself to eat and after a few spoonfuls... he vomited" (180); subsequently, he "awoke in nausea, afraid to sleep although when he was awake the thick foul-smelling sickness was worse to bear than his nightmares. He often wished for death" (180). Similarly, Bakha refuses to eat the sticky bread brought by his brother Rakha from a wedding in the cantonment even in a moment of extreme hunger: "He felt sick. He

tried to drop the soft crumb he had got hold, but some of it stuck to his fingers still. It was nauseating. He rose from the floor” (76). Therefore, he goes out to console himself in the wedding of Ram Charan’s sister (77) and overcomes his immediate aversion to life by impulsively choosing to go for an event full of fun, feasting and fulfilment. Later he freely relates his woes to Ram Charan and Chota and recovers his usual zest for life: “With this his knitted brows relaxed and his furrowed forehead became uncreased. The cowed defiance of his manner gave place to an easy, natural air” (90).

Not only is Bakha likened to the animals, but he also exhibits certain animal traits by his protective behaviour in the most critical situations. For the safety of his life, he employs the innate “biological wisdom” – the animal cunning stored in the human genes and suppressed deep down by the civilising forces of society. As mentioned earlier, in extreme situations these primal tendencies come automatically into action and the biological laws regulate the human behaviour in favour of life. Commenting on such survival strategies of the camp inmates, Des Pres comments: “Part of the uniqueness of man is that in addition to normal adaptation, he seems adjusted to *possible* dangers, to threat as potential condition” (195). The camp prisoners spontaneously resort to their animal instincts in extreme situations for the security of their lives from the blood hound guards. For instance, Senka in *One Day* suggests to another inmate, “If you show your pride too much... you are lost. There was truth in that. Better to growl and submit. If you were stubborn they broke you” (45). The German girl in *Night* tells Eliezer something very similar: ““Bite your little lip, brother.... Don’t cry. Keep your anger and hatred for another day... Grit your teeth and wait”” (64). Bakha adopts the same strategy for security and self-control. While climbing up the temple stairs to see the prayers in action, the scavenger doesn’t want to be seen by the priest and other upper caste people in the fear of another assault. However, he cannot resist the temptation and uses his animal acumen to relieve his curiosity without risk: “But he soon lost his grace in the low stoop which the dead weight of years of habitual bending cast on him. He became the humble, oppressed under-dog that he was by birth, afraid of everything, creeping slowly up, in a curiously hesitant, cringing movement” (50). Again, while telling his friends about Sohini’s molestation, his anger mounts to dangerous proportions and then suddenly subsides like in the case of a caged lion: “He gnashed his teeth. A warmth rose to his ears. He felt a quickening in his blood. Then came the sweeping of his ever-recurring emotions. He boiled with rage.... But he couldn’t do anything. He hung his head and walked with a drooping chest” (89). Here, Bakha’s controlled reaction reminds Charlie Citrine’s behaviour in Bellow’s *Humboldt’s Gift* (1975) who prevents the hoodlum Cantabile from shooting him by taking a conscious advantage of Konrad Lorenz’s discussion of wolves: “The defeated wolf offered his throat, and the victor snapped but wouldn’t bite. So I was bowing my head” (82). Even earlier Bakha uses the same artifice of “low life” to save himself from the angry crowd encircling him after he bumped into the upper caste merchant. He “fumes” to retort the public humiliation but

instead stands “with joined hands in the centre” (42) and later walks away regretting his mistake: “I should have begun to sweep the thoroughfare. I should have seen the high caste people in the street” (43).

Bakha’s animal instinct keeps him persistently active and alert against the possible incursions on his body and soul. Action for him becomes another effective mode of replenishment and resistance against deprecation and dehumanisation. The camp prisoners often employ action as one of the most effective strategies of survival – they work skilfully to prolong their life by winning the appreciation of the guards. To keep active and alert is a regular custom for diverting their attention from tedium and terror. For instance, Bok is determined “to hold on, wait it out” (246) till the commencement of his trial. Hence, he endures unending wait and unrelieved agony amidst the filthy conditions of the jail by keeping himself intensely active in his mind and body. Yakov talks to himself to kill time, remembers from Spinoza that “life is life and there’s no sense kicking it in the grave” (72), and sings psalms while sitting in the prison cell. He mends his clothes, and recalls stories of Peretz, Aleichem and Chekhov. Furthermore, Bok spends his time in eating, thinking and making wood for fire, “to keep in the dark unsettled centre of the mind a candle burning” (224). When he is not given clean food, he goes on fast and compels the prison guard to serve him from the common kitchen. He slowly recovers his strength by cleaning his cell daily: “Yakov used to... sweep the cell every morning, working not too hard at first because he still felt weak; yet he needed the exercise to keep his strength up” (184). With his peaceful endurance of the unending misery, Yakov finds some sympathisers among his sworn enemies who inspire him not to die (280).

Similarly, Bakha works dutifully and efficiently, and thereby he earns appreciation of the upper caste Havildar Charat Singh who immediately promises to give him a hockey stick for his good work (9). The Havildar’s unexpected gesture of generosity gives him fresh hope and happiness, and in turn he continues to work equally well for the rest of the day in spite of all the miseries: “He worked away earnestly, quickly, without loss of effort. Brisk yet steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring” (7). His active engagement shows he has an immense hidden strength “lying deep, deep in his body, for as he rushed along with considerable skill and alacrity from one doorless latrine to another, cleaning, brushing, pouring phenol, he seemed as easy as a wave sailing away on a deep-bedded river. ‘What a dexterous workman!’ the onlooker would have said” (8). Bakha’s passion for work proves his love for life and his dogged determination to preserve it. Shukhov in *One Day* displays the same primal determination to protect his life; he derives joy and inspiration for survival amidst the anti-life conditions by doing his work skilfully and satisfactorily. While fixing the pump, he gets totally absorbed in his job: “And then every thought was swept out of his head. All his memories and worries faded. He had only one idea – to fix the bend in the stove-pipe and hang it up to prevent it smoking” (52). Moreover, while constructing the wall Shukhov and his fellow inmates derive the

warmth necessary for survival in the sub-zero climate: “And now Shukhov and other masons felt the cold no longer. Thanks to the urgent work, the first wave of heat had come over them – when you feel under your coat, under your jacket, under your shirt and your vest.... Their feet didn’t feel cold, that was the main thing. Nothing else mattered. Even the breeze, light but piercing could not distract them from the work” (82).

Like Solzhenitsyn’s inmates, Bakha cleans latrines vigorously to enthuse his body with warmth and strength. He attacks his work like a soldier does with his enemy on a battlefield. Bakha’s assault on the work is also a compensatory mechanism for his inability to revenge the cruelty of the upper caste people who have assigned the filthy job to him. Hence his fierce invasion on his work purifies the foulness and frustration implicit in his profession: “And he was completely oblivious during the quarter of an hour he took to finish a fourth round of the latrines, oblivious alike of the time and of the sweat trickling down his forehead, of the warmth in his body and of the sense of power that he felt as he ended up” (12). Action replenishes his strength and renders him totally impervious to his misfortunes as an outcaste: “It was a sort of insensitivity created in him by the kind of work he had to do, a tough skin which must be a shield against all the awful sensations” (12).

Away from work, Bakha’s primal bio-meter turns to nature for solace, sustenance and security. As he works in the sunshine, lies in the shade of trees, breathes in fresh air and watches birds flying in the sky, Bakha feels fresh, free from all the caste constraints, and forgets all his anger or animosity toward the perpetrators of cruelty on him (83-86, 110, 124). His contact with nature fills him with fresh energy for further endurance in the time of torment. The camp prisoners later resort to the same strategy for the sustenance of their primal self with energy and endurance. Yakov is so thrilled to receive the sun-rays in his dark cell that it compares to his joy of eating at moments of extreme hunger. His elemental self responds spontaneously to the sun rays with joy and reverence as if they have brought the message of a new life for him: “The morning dark was different from the night dark. The morning dark had a little freshness, a little anticipation in it.... In the morning the shadows unfurled until one only was left, that which lingered in the cell the whole day. It was gone for a minute near eleven he guessed, when a beam of sunlight, on days the sun appeared, touched the corroded wall a foot above his mattress, a beam of golden light gone in a minute. Once he kissed it on the wall. Once he licked it with his tongue” (194-195). Alyosha in *One Day* brims with joy on watching the day break: “Far in the distance, on the other side of the sight, the sun, red and enormous, was rising in haze, its beams cutting obliquely through the gates, the whole building sight and the fence. Alyosha who was sitting next to Shukhov, gazed at the sun, and looked happy, a smile on his lips” (39). Shukhov’s pristine self also diffuses into the transcendent and timeless domains at the touch of nature: “Shukhov looked up at the sky and gasped: it was clear that the sun had climbed almost to the dinner-hour. Wonder of wonders! How time flew when you were working! (56). Similarly, when Bakha faces the rising sun on his

way to the town, he feels his sagging strength recovered and his body pain (caused by the prolonged hours of cleaning) relieved.

He sniffed at the clean, fresh air around the flat stretch before him and vaguely sensed a difference between the odorous, smoky world of refuse and the open, radiant world of the sun.... He lifted his face to the sun, open-eyed for a moment, then the pupils of his eyes half closed, half open. And he lifted his chin upright. It was pleasing to him. It seemed to give him a thrill, a queer sensation which spread on the surface of his flesh where the tincture of warmth penetrated the numbed skin. He felt vigorous in this bracing atmosphere. (25)

As the sun reactivates his primal instincts, he at once regresses into his joyful childhood when

he used to strip himself naked, except for a loincloth, to stand in the sun, and rub mustard oil on his body. Recollecting this he looked up at the sun. He caught the full force of its glare, and was dazed. He stood lost for a moment, confused in the simmering rays, feeling as though there were nothing but the sun, the sun, the sun, everywhere in him, on him, before him and behind him. It was a pleasant sensation in spite of the disconcerting suddenness with which it had engulfed him. He felt suspended, as it were, in a region of buoyant tenseness. (25)

Interestingly, in similar circumstances, Kosinski's six-year old boy in *The Painted Bird* (1965) exhibits the same propensity – to instinctively escape into nature whenever threatened by society (92-93, 140-41). The anonymous orphan represents the pristine human self, and the society in which he moves represents, in all its inhuman aspects, a world completely averse to human freedom. The boy ultimately survives the Holocaust and wins a victory over the destructive forces of the world with the help of his innate ingenuity. Like Kosinski's orphan, Bakha turns to benevolent nature in moments of intense melancholy and detachment from the world:

The hand of nature was stretching itself out towards him, for the tall grass on the slopes of Bulashah Hills was in sight, and he had opened his heart to it, lifted by the cool breeze that wafted him away from the crowds, the ugliness and the noise of the outcasts' street. He looked across at the swaying loveliness before him and the little hillocks over which it spread under a sunny sky, so transcendently blue and beautiful that he felt like dumb and motionless before it. (83)

Here, Bakha feels consoled and comfortable, away from the cacophony and cruelty of the town: "His inside seemed to know that it wouldn't be soothed if there were the slightest obstruction between him and the outer world. It didn't even occur to him to ask why he had come here. He was just swamped by the merest fringe of the magnificent fields that spread before him. He had been startled into an awareness of the mystery of vegetable moods" (84). With the social constraints loosened at the

liberating touch of nature, Bakha opens his heart to Ram Charan and Chota about the day's insults and injuries. Thereafter he becomes fit again to take further humiliations from the babu's wife (106) and his own father (108) without resorting to an angry retaliation.

Nature embalms Bakha to solace, and he plunges into the wild realms of fantasy, reverie and remembrance. These attributes are some of the other naturally available sources of sublimation and soothing to humans in adverse circumstances. They directly manifest the inherent human craving for spiritual freedom as a counterfoil to the unbreakable mental and physical constraints. By these measures, the victim forgets his pain, fulfils his wish, and instils in him a rare degree of longing for life; and to preserve his life, he endures peacefully during his unequal ordeal for survival and slowly acquires a rare degree of resilience. As Todorov observes, "The fantastic explores the inner space; it sides with the imagination, the anxiety of existence, and the hope of salvation" (36). Thus in prison Yakov fills the void by romantically fantasising his first meeting with his wife, which was full of love and food:

I scratch at memory. I think of Raisl. I am in prison so what difference does it make? The first time I saw her she was riding in her father's rickety wagon, drawn by the bony lag of late memory.... She was a thin lanky girl with small breasts. I remember her dark hair in braids, deep eyes and a long neck.... We walked together in the woods by the water, she and I. I showed her my tools.... If there was a little chicken to eat I came also on Friday nights. Raisl blessed the candles and served the food. It was very nice. (190-91)

Likewise, in a state of malnourishment, Shukov recalls the way they "used to eat in his village: whole saucepans of potatoes, pots of porridge and, in the early days, big chunks of meat. And milk enough to split their guts" (43). Bakha also occasionally draws upon his imagination to realise his hidden desire in moments of extreme dejection. He transports himself into the inaccessible world of the English by mimicking their life-style. By this he attempts to raise the protective thickets around him against the upper caste people who fear and revere the English. He has been "to work at the Tommies' barracks, and obtained glimpses of another world, strange and beautiful; he had grown out of his native shoes into the ammunition boots that he had secured as a gift. And with this and other strange and exotic items of dress he had built up a new world, which was commendable, if for nothing else, because it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born" (69). Like him, the camp inmates too mimic the guards to mitigate their anger and apathy. It helps them not to provoke the guards who would otherwise kill them instantaneously. Eugene Kogon, an inmate from Buchenwald, says, "the concentration camp inmates knew a whole system of mimicry toward the SS," an "ever-present camouflage" which concealed true feelings (283). Bakha adopts an identical strategy to create a safe distance with his tormentors – not by mimicking the

upper caste Hindus but their English rulers. Thus he thus carries around an imaginary sense of superiority; it pampers his sense of uniqueness, which he prefers not to injure by retorting the insulting behaviour of the upper caste people. It is a silent ambush and a subtle camouflage against the caste system. By joining the English, Bakha wants to break the hierarchical triangle (him/the upper caste Hindus/the English) and set a binary opposition with his oppressors (the upper class Hindus/the English-Bakha) so that his assault on the Hindu hierarchy makes a silent but sure impact. It would enable *him* to attack the *Other* from the vantage point of power to upset the foul system of social hierarchy from the root. Hence, Bakha's mimicry of the English is not merely an imaginary escape route from the oppressive system but also a real expression of his radical wish to endure and exterminate the hostile system.

On a later occasion, angered over the filthy food brought by Rakha from the barracks (76), Bakha impulsively leaves for Ram Charan's house to have a glimpse of the latter's sister on the occasion of her marriage (77). In anguish, he undergoes a libidinal regression and his hunger for food transforms into hunger for carnal fulfilment. On the way he gets swayed into his childhood memories about "how, while he had been playing with her brother and Chota in the barracks, they had come home and started to play at marriage. Ram Charan's little sister was made to act the wife because she wore a skirt. Bakha was chosen to play the husband because he was wearing the gold embroidered cap. The rest of the boys took the part of the members of the marriage party" (77-78). Since then Bakha has harboured a secret wish for the girl and has thought of her with adoration:

In the darkness of his home in night, when he lay half asleep, something in him secretly led him towards the vague sylph-like form which he could have squeezed in the embrace of his arms, and still he could not connect the feelings he had at such moments with the ripples that surged up in him whenever he caught sight of Ram Charan's sister. (78)

An estuary of "buried desire" erupts in him for the girl who has grown ripe young and quite tall by now. And soon his sweet reminiscences swell into a sumptuous erotic fantasy: "An impulse had arisen like a sudden gust of wind to his brain, and darkened his thoughts. He had felt as if he could forcibly gather the girl in his embrace and ravish her" (79). Besides, Bakha regains his cheerfulness and revives his strength by recalling some of the heroic moments from his childhood like Hemingway's Santiago who exhibits a similar tendency in the perilous moments of extreme exhaustion and hopelessness while struggling to tame the marlin. The old fisherman reclaims his strength by remembering such elating events as his victory in hand game with the great negro of Cienfuegos at Casablanca (75), DiMaggio's incredible victory in one of the baseball games in spite of a bone spur (73), and the African lions he had seen in his childhood (27). While rambling along in detachment "from the human world, swathed in a sort of unadulterated melancholy" (83), Bakha similarly recalls "the time in his early days when he used to come to the heath with all the other boys, to fight

battles for the imaginary fort they had built by fixing a flag on the top of the hill. The bamboo bows with which they flung arrows at each other came before him and the imitation toy pistols with their sparks. How enthusiastic all the boys used to feel about him then. They had made him their *Jernel* (general). He recalled with pride the pitched battle they had fought against the boys of the 28<sup>th</sup> Sikhs and won” (84). Enthused by such heroic remembrances, Bakha leaves for Charat Singh’s house to receive the hockey stick for a repeat performance with the rival team. In that mood of mirth, memory and desire Bakha also fulfils his craving for the solar topee (cap) by imagining “himself playing hockey with the solar topee on. He saw himself running about in it. How important he looked, the idol of all the boys” (94).

Sports, silence and sleep are other primal measures of self-preservation against perpetual agony and potential threat to life. Sports supply the human body with natural energy for a healthy life and foster in the player qualities of endurance, tolerance and obedience by his strict compliance with the rules. The inmates in some of the holocaust novels crack jokes, sing and play among them before going to sleep at night. They find it a subtle means of relief from fatigue and rejuvenation to an active life. Their collective sense of mirth and joy as well as of victory and loss gives them a temporary feeling of freedom and interminable fellowship, and their mutual affiliations prompt them to offer a collective resistance to the common calamity. In *Fateless* (1975), a fourteen year young boy, George Koves, says about his experiences at Auschwitz: “ At any rate, here too time passed; here too we had Leather-Worker with us; here too a few jokes were cracked. Here too we played, if not with horse-shoe nails, then with stones that were all won by Silky Boy; here Rozy occasionally called out, ‘Let’s sing it in Japanese now!’” (86). Moreover, a Polish inmate in *Night* advises his fellow inmates: “‘Comrades, you’re in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. There’s a long road of suffering ahead of you.... We are all brothers, and we are all suffering the same fate. The same smoke floats over all our heads. Help one another. It is the only way to survive...’” (53). Therefore, the inmates get divided into small resistance groups and act in coordination with each other for the safety of all in the camp. Bakha and his friends indeed appear to be one such resistance group. When he tells them about what happened to him in the market and to his sister in the temple, his friends Ram Charan and Chota share his anger and promise to teach the priest a lesson whenever “‘that illegally begotten comes to our street side. We will skin the fellow’” (88). To beguile his anger they invite him to play hockey against the 31<sup>st</sup> Punjabis. Soon after, he leaves to get a new hockey stick from Charat Singh, reminiscing the Havildar’s heroic exploits on the hockey playground: “He recalled the story current about Charat Singh that the days he didn’t spend playing hockey he spent in hospital suffering from the wounds and bruises he received playing hockey.... The number of scars he had on his body equalled in number, said the babu’s son, the marks of sword and lance on the body of the Rajput warrior, the conqueror of Akbar, the great Moghul” (96).

On receiving a brand new stick from Charat Singh, Bakha forgets all his miseries and feels happy as if he has got the Holy Grail, which would magically transform all outcasts' barren destiny into fertile fortunes. He plays like a "savage hunter" (105) until the fight breaks out between the two teams and the babu's younger child gets wounded in the stone pelting. Bakha carries the bleeding child to his mother who severely humiliates him for polluting her son. Refurbished with fresh energy, Bakha once again endures the insult humbly and silently (106), without allowing the fire lying "buried" in the "mass of his flesh" to flare up into a "wild flame" (109). Like Bellow's Charlie Citrine, Bakha uses "low-life expertise" to win a moral victory over his tormentors. Under severe threat from Cantabile and Denise, Citrine assumes strategic silence to save him from physical harm and moral defilement. He knows that "inflammation of the heart and burning words" (228) will only aggravate matters: "No, the name of the game was silence, hardness and silence. I wasn't going to talk" (228). Citrine tactfully escapes their clutches without letting them cause any injury to him. Similarly, Chief Bromden in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) cunningly assumes a strategic silence to save himself from the murderous madness of the Big Nurse. He finally comes unharmed out of the nightmarish conditions of extreme cruelty in the lunatic asylum, while his counterpart McMurphy who fights the Combine openly dies tragically. Having suffered utter humiliation "silently" (42) from the merchant and other shopkeepers in the market, Bakha walks away shouting "'*Posh, posh, sweeper coming!*'" (44) towards the "quiet" (46) street where the sight of the brass instruments and uniforms in the band shop reminds him of "the military band of the 38<sup>th</sup> Dogras which he saw almost every day practising in the cantonment, and he partly forgot the insult and the injury which he had suffered; he felt soothed; his grief was assuaged" (46). Here Bakha's plight closely resembles the predicament of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The upper caste people cannot *see* him amidst their utter *moral darkness* and he has to announce his presence to prevent them from bumping into him.<sup>3</sup> Like Chief Bromden, Bakha inherits his silence from his ancestors because "in the lives of this riff-raff, this scum of the earth, these dregs of humanity, only silence, grim silence, the silence of death fighting for life prevailed" (27). However, part of Bakha's insults and injuries descend into his sub-conscious to resurface in his sleep. Given little respite, his tired body gives in to sleep – the primordial balm of nature (60, 86, 110). Like Bakha, Yakov frequently lapses into sleep and dreams for the sublimation of his anguish and the sustenance of his strength (169, 225, etc). While in Buchenwald, George Koves finds sleep "all erasing" (109) and, therefore, he feels "that an hour's worth of good sleep is worth any price, any risk" (117). Likewise, Santiago dreams of the African lions in the beginning and the end of his sail into the sea (27, 140) to sublimate his frustration and to sustain

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<sup>3</sup>For the similarities of the "mind styles" and "attitudes" between Anand and Ellison, and between Bakha and the *Invisible Man* as reflected from their "lexical choices," see V. Prakasham's "Lexicalization of Attitudes: Notes on the Mind Styles of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," *Semiotics of Language, Literature and Culture*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1999: 36-47.

himself with the lion-like primal strength. Sleep transports Bakha into a free world where all callous social conventions cease to operate. While Bakha's mind is relaxed, his internalised agony erupts "in the labyrinthine depths of his unconscious weaving strange, weird fantasies and dreams" (60). His grief turns into bizarre scenes and situations implying a grotesque mixture of humour and pathos, profane and sacred, death and life, and damnation and salvation. Thus when the upper caste woman throws the pancake to him from the top of her house, he "picked it up quietly and wrapped it up in a duster with other bread he had received" (65). This shows how Bakha endures another excruciating insult without letting the "curious fire" fume in him. With his extraordinary capacity of endurance, he enjoys "a wild yet marvellously controlled medium" (109), and "a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession and the sub-human status to which he was condemned from birth" (12).

At the end of the dismal day, Mahatma Gandhi, the miracle man, comes to Bulashah like the Russian and the Allied forces arrived at the German camps to set the surviving inmates free at the end of the war. Gandhi breaks the barricades of Bakha's spiritual captivity and "unwinds" the "winding path" of his mental servility. The "circle" (39) of the crowd has now turned "oval" (126), suggesting the deflation and diminution of the upper caste dictum of social incarceration. Bakha reluctantly joins the large public gathering at the Golbagh, symbolising the inexorable human kinship irrespective of caste, community and religion. Bakha's sudden union with the crowd of people from "different races, colours, castes and creeds" (126) relieves his sense of inferiority, insecurity and isolation. For the moment he forgets the fact of being an "Untouchable" (126). Under the sudden sense of liberation, Bakha unthinkingly touches some anonymous people of the unknown castes and fearlessly relates himself to Gandhi (133), the common emblem of freedom for the entire Indian community. Gandhi's views against untouchability fascinate Bakha to the extent that he promises to practice them ever after (147). As the sun descends on the Western horizon (colonialism), Bakha ambivalently walks away from the Golbagh, in the blue darkness with a "handful of stars" (hope of freedom) throbbing "in the heart of the sky" (147). Like the camp survivors come back with the hope of a new life and no more war, Bakha returns home with the distant glimmers of a new dawn in post-independence India when there would be no more untouchable scavengers. The camp survivors come back anxious to bear testimony to the inhuman callousness perpetrated on them by their fellow humans. Bakha returns home eager to tell his father "all that Gandhi said" about the outcasts and "all that the poet said" about the scavenging machines (148). Bakha's father is an emblem of eternal slavery to the high class Hindu system. For that reason, he suggests his aggrieved son to be servile to the upper caste people because "They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us. Some of them are kind" (71). Hence, Bakha's homecoming, despite his dislike for his father (77), signifies his silent acceptance of the existing system but not without a hope of liberation in the near or distant future.

Bakha's primal responses, which closely resemble those of the actual and fictional survivors' in extremity, add a radically different dimension to his character and crisis. They indicate that he is not confronted with an ordinary social situation deserving of sympathy or empathy, and that his treatment merely as a victim of social discrimination would trivialise his extraordinary stature as "a man." The enormity of Bakha's enterprise is comparable to that of the camp inmates in Russia and Germany, and his ordeal for survival seeks the same degree of endurance as the camp survivors. He affirms human dignity against evil and thereby emerges as, what Lionel Trilling says, the self "conceived in opposition to the general culture" (xiv). By his extraordinary quality of endurance, Bakha attains the heroic stature of epical nature, which cannot be ascribed to the upper caste people who are physically weak and morally vulnerable. As Swami Vivekananda says, "He who does the lower work is not therefore a lower man. No man is to be judged by the mere nature of his duties, but all should be judged by the manner and the spirit in which they perform them" (57). One gets the glimmers of Bakha's epical dimensions from his larger than life images, relating back to *Mahabharata*, the Hindu holy epic of righteousness. He is Krishna in his dark (or black) colour (12, 65), Arjuna in his lion-like strength and elephant-like gait (26, 83),<sup>4</sup> Abhimanyu in his circuitous movements in the winding streets (chakaravyuha) of Bulashah (35), and Ghatotkach in his giant stride that makes the upper caste people panicky in the temple (54). Anand thus re-scripts an outcasts' *Mahabharata* in which the upper class Hindus act as the Kaurvas, untouchables as the Pandavas, and Bakha as Abhimanyu or Arjuna or the "new Krishna." He is many in one, and one for all the lower class people. Thus the Hindu myth of righteousness and *dharma* stands subverted.

Bakha shines out in his unprecedented physical and moral ordeal against the indomitable odds of the social order with the help of his own inner resources. Devoid of all external help, he falls back on his instinctive ingenuity to protect the primal innocence of his soul against the humiliation and hatred of the so-called civilised upper caste people. His innocence enables him to withstand the arduous physical struggle and acute spiritual suffering and to keep intact his innate qualities of self-control, sense of duty and silent forbearance. All this endows him with a special status as a human being, much to the envy of the upper caste people and more to the pride of the lower caste pariahs. Bakha's attributes of endurance are rooted in his savage instincts; they are sustained and sharpened by his heredity, poverty and illiteracy. The upper caste people have lost this primal quality to their ancestral inheritance of richness, refinement, comforts and cunning. With the loss of their innocence they have

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<sup>4</sup>Ved Vyasa frequently likens Arjuna with an elephant in *The Mahabharata*. One of the more conspicuous instances is available from Draupadi's *svayamvara* (self-choice of the bridegroom) when the spectators praise him for his sturdy physique comparing him with an elephant: "The youth is grand enough. He is like the trunk of the king of elephants. His shoulders, thighs, and arms are solid with muscle. And he stands fast like the Himalayas" (352). Again, when Arjuna walks to receive the hand of Draupadi from her father King Draupad, Krishna holds Arjuna's trailing deer-skin dress and "joyously follows [like a] cow after elephant..." (361).

fallen prey to the lower instinct of hatred, cruelty and false prestige. By his peaceful ordeal against the social inequality, Bakha redeems his birth as an untouchable and reclaims the rightful honour of a true Hindustani who politely spurns Colonel Hutchinson's persuasions to embrace Christianity. From the start Bakha flows like an ever-widening stream of endurance, equanimity, perseverance and peace to ultimately mingle with the Gandhian sea of social equality, liberty and fraternity. Bakha walks like a colossus over the vast stretches of social deprivation, and his heroic ordeal against the mammoth evil of caste system gives hope of emancipation from the racial complex of inferiority to the hapless millions in modern India.

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