CHAPTER - II

Social Heredity

"What status should be attributed to those who are placed even lower in the social hierarchy? There is no karma considered for them, they must reside away from the other castes in a space, which we will not know whether it be human or savage; at a level on the scale of beings which places them lower than domesticated animals. One of the consequences of the ritual origin of the hierarchy of the beings is that there is no break between humanity and animality."1

There can be no doubt that the characteristic feature of all living beings are unalterably fixed by heredity. Our family traits were determined by the hereditary constitutions of our ancestors and our personal traits by our parents. Race, sex and mental capacity into which we are born are fixed and cannot be changed. In the same way, the social heredity of caste system can not be altered and thus passes unto their progeny as a socio-psychological inheritance. This caste system is usually characterized by hierarchies whose members have hereditary professions and are segregated strictly by rules restricting social interchange to persons of the same caste. Their social status is based on a complex ritual of "purity and impurity", the qualities being ascribed to social categories considered antagonistic and irreducible; the Brahmin priests, ideally the holders of maximum purity, are at the top of the system while the untouchables - the holders of maximum impurity are at the bottom. These untouchables have been ascribed not only the maximum but are also seen as permanent pollutants, an assumption which is frequently based on the special nature of their hereditary professions. The common idea that the above stigma which arises
from the activities traditionally attributed to them, imply regular contact with polluted materials. This assertion is reinforced by the central idea of Hinduism – the relation between Karma and the cycle of reincarnation, according to which the untouchables are the persons condemned to expiate severe transgressions committed in a previous existence. It is because of this, that the untouchables from the time immemorial have been excluded from the social and ritual space of the other castes. The present study will clearly indicate how the social heredity of caste system becomes a great catalyst in the development and shapes the destiny of man.

Mulk Raj Anand, a major novelist of the thirties was concerned with man in society. In his novels he presents us with a picture of great complexity, a reflection of society and the factors determining social change. He looked deep into the human consciousness, the lowly, squalor and ugliness of human life, against a background of a taboo - ridden society and its callous laws. It is in this respect that Anand transcends naturalism and succeeded in striking a universal note. This is reflected in both his novels – Untouchable (1935) and The Road (1963). Social heredity and its part in making and unmaking the destiny of man became the core of his fictional writing. In these two novels which are naturalistic studies, he explored the lives of the poor, the outcastes and sought to embrace their tragedy crushed by the relentless immobility of the rigid class structure and imperial feudalism.

The protagonists of these novels are highly sensitive. Compassion and love, endurance and suffering are the fundamental experiences in their lives; but the hereditary stigma which bind them for generations prevent them from being socially
accepted and suppress their freedom. Their low status becomes a handicap preventing them from shaking off the bondage of untouchability. However, having faith in the possibility of controlling nature for the improvement of man’s conditions, they also stand out as rebels against the existing social conditions which delimit their freedom of expression. They suffer because they cannot accept and resign themselves to their faith yet often enough they find themselves unequal to the task of putting their ideas as well as desires into practice.

The problem of the first novel *The Untouchable (1935)* is the age-old social evil of the segregation of an individual who follows the hereditary profession of scavenging. The scavenger is an outcaste whose mere touch pollutes the people—a superstition that the ‘three thousand years of racial and caste superiority’ have engendered. It is, in fact, analogous to the equally hateful attitude of apartheid, shown by the ‘whites’ in their relation with ‘blacks’. This execrable practice is religiously institutionalized in the ineradicable caste system of the Hindu society. It is against this inhuman system that the protagonist of Anand’s novel rebels in silence. The novel encapsulates a single day in the scavenger’s life, Bakha; and the whole drama of the misery of untouchability takes place which minutely describes the various humiliations suffered by the hero of the novel, in his regular rounds of cleaning the town.

Bakha was treated by the upper castes with condescension bordering on contempt often insulted and humiliated just because he happen to belong to a particular caste. Bakha is a representative of untouchable exemplifying the
predicament of not only the so-called Hindu untouchables but also dispossessed man everywhere. *The Untouchable (1935)* selectively narrates the incident that happened to him and suggests the impact of naturalism on the gradual growth of his personality. It exposes the evils of caste system and deals with the misery and wretchedness of poor and their struggle for a better life. Mulk Raj Anand has produced in *Bakha*, a strong sense of awareness of his socially low status and the possible way out of the situation in which he was forced to live. He sought an identity for himself in a world which has for years, suppressed all the persons of his kind.

The very beginning of the novel gives us a vivid picture of the outcaste's colony in which all the untouchables live. The colony is dark, damp and uncongenial. The thatched mud houses clustered together in two rows are utterly ill fitted for human habitation. It looks as though all the inhabitations of the colony are sub-human non entities huddled together. The consciousness that surrounds them is that they should be content to live in the gutter like worms only to be crushed by the superior caste:

The outcaste's colony was a group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcasts of Hindu society...... The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarters a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuge that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the
misery which lay within it, made it an 'un-congenial'
place to live in.\textsuperscript{2}

These unfortunate dwellers are segregated from the rural community, dreaded as lepers and treated most contemptuously inspite of the enormously useful work they do in cleaning up the entire village as well as draining the latrines and urinals of upper castes men. The sweeper is worst off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and may become free from servitude and bondage but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape. Unclean himself, he pollutes others with a mere touch. He is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. It is his duty to call out and warn the people that he is coming. Nonetheless, society insults him perpetually thereby dwarfing his natural growth and checks his potentialities for proper manifestation. The primary aim of Anand in this novel is to reflect casteism as a cruel evil, which suppress the untouchables who are denied their fundamental rights to grow into respectable men of society. Anand has brought into focus the ups and downs in the drama of Bakha’s soul and whole gamut of experiences so as to suggest the deep spiritual crisis that has engulfed the sweeper boy. Like others of community, he was subjected to humiliations and indifferences by high caste Hindus. He was aware of his low position and also conscious of his inability to offer resistance against the inhuman treatment ruthlessly meted out to him. He was born in a sweeper family and as such, never provided the proper upbringing requisite of a civilized man. Mulk Raj Anand himself has amplified the whole idea thus:

\begin{quote}
I glimpsed the truth that the tragedy of my hero (Bakha) lay in the fact that he was never allowed qualities of manhood.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}
Bakha does not hesitate in the discharge of his menial duties, despite the fact that he is often insulted and abused both by the Hindus and his own father, Lakha, the jamedar of all the sweepers in the cantonment. He undergoes some bitter and traumatic experiences, encounters many humiliating incidents which psychologically leaves him dissatisfied. Though he is quite tired after his morning round of cleaning latrines, he returns to his hut with the hope of quenching his thirst with a cup of tea. He goes out readily at the disposal of his father, to sweep the market road and the temple courtyard. He feels elated as he moves towards the gate of the town which offers him a gallery of colourful things. Now he stops at a shop to buy a packet of ‘Red Lamp’ cigarette. He puts an anna on the board. The shopkeeper sprinkle some water over the coin, picks it up and throws it into the counter. Then he throws a packet of cigarette at Bakha. This humiliating incident has been portrayed in the following way:

Then he flung a packet of ‘Red Lamp’ cigarettes at Bakha, as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop.4

This insult annoys the sensitive lad but he goes his way. His instinct tells him that as a sweeper boy he should show himself in people’s presence as little as possible. A scavenger to be seen smoking constituted an offence against the God.

A similar incident occurs a little ahead in the main street where Bakha goes again to sweep the market road and temple courtyard. Walking along and watching the shops, Bakha is attracted to a sweet shop. “Standing in a corner, he stole a glance at the shop to see which was the cheapest thing he could buy.” Having made up his mind, he orders jellebies “in a low voice as he courageously advanced ...
his head was bent. He was vaguely ashamed and self conscious at being seen buying
sweets." He bought four annas worth of cheap sweet-meat, after weighing the
consequences of doing so both in philosophic and rational terms. Anand has masterly
presented this scene which contains Bakha’s suppressed feelings and emotions
before buying sweet-meat:

‘Eight annas in my pocket,’ he said to himself, ‘dare I
buy some sweets? If my father comes to know that I
spend all my money on 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.’

Bakha asked for jellebies worth four annas from a Bengali sweet vendor with a great
alacrity which the confectioner throws at him simply because he is an untouchable
and Bakha catches it reluctantly:

The alacrity with which he lifted the little string
attached to the middle of the rod, balanced the
scales for shortest possible space of time and threw
the sweets into a piece torn off an old ‘Daily Mail,’
was as amazing as it was baffling to poor Bakha, who
knew he had been cheated, but dared not complain. He
cought the jellebies which the confectioner threw at
him like a cricket ball, placed four nickel coins on
the shoe – board for the confectioner’s assistant who
stood ready to splash some water on them, and walked
away, embarrassed yet happy.

Bakha’s annoyance knew no bounds at the contemptuous behaviour of the shop-
keeper but he finds unable to raise his voice against this callous behaviour. He fails
to show any reaction to the humiliating treatment meted to him which reflects the
passivity and timidness inherent in his character. A deep and clear reflection of social
heredity prevents him from displaying adequate resentment to the perpetrators of
inhuman acts. Bakha feels severely handicapped to act in a decisive way. R. S. Singh elaborates the factors that bar Bakha from acting effectively:

He was aware of the limitations of the given social structure, and was also ready to acknowledge the rising rebellion within him, but in the absence of any perceptible alternative he was unable to translate that protest into action. That moment came only when he saw three alternatives to the same problem of untouchability.  

Another step leading to Bakha’s stunning realization of his untouchability is when he faces one more situation of utter ignominy as he was scolded by a passerby for his act of unintentionally touching him. Moving along and enjoying the jellebies, he happens to become absorbed in looking at the woman at a window. In his distraction, he accidentally brushes against another man. The man yells and swears at him in the foulest manner for touching him, thereby polluting him and his fresh clothes. He castigates Bakha for not having limited himself to a side of the street and not announcing his approach. This produces an endless torrent of vulgar abuses from the man. Bakha is utterly stunned by the venomous outpouring of abuses.

Bakha stood amazed, embarrassed. He was deaf and dumb. His senses were paralysed. Only fear gripped his soul, fear and humility and servility. He was used to being spoken to roughly. But he had seldom been taken so unawares. The curious smile of humility which always hovered on his lips in the presence of high-caste men, now became more pronounced. He lifted his face to the man opposite him, though his eyes were bent down. Then he stole a hurried glance at the man. The fellow’s eyes were flaming.

Bakha’s intention was not to pollute Lallaji. He finally finds his tongue to apologize and asks for forgiveness but in vain.

‘Nahi; Lallaji, it is not true that I beat this child, it is not true, Bakha pleaded. I have erred now,’ ‘I forgot to
call. I beg your forgiveness. It won’t happen again. I forgot. I beg your forgiveness. It won’t happen again.’
But the crowd which pressed round him, starring, pulling grimaces, jeering and leering, was without a shadow of pity for his remorse.’

But the crowd stands around him unmoved, taking a sort of sadistic delight in watching him cower and feeling a sense of its power, while Bakha suffers in mental anguish:

To Bakha, every second seemed an endless age of woe and suffering. His whole demeanour was concentrated in humility, and in his heart there was a queer stirring. His legs trembled and shook under him. He felt they would fail him. He was really sorry and tried hard to convey his repentance to his tormentors. But the barrier of space that the crowd had placed between themselves and him seemed to prevent his feeling from getting across.

Then there gathered a big crowd who continued to scold him mercilessly. In due course of time, encouraged by the people, Lallaji at once gave him a slap for what he has done. After the incident, he stands amazed, embarrassed and mentally paralyzed.

Here again, Bakha proves himself to be a disappointing figure as he does not react to this humiliation. Though aware of self respect, he restrains himself from thinking in terms of retaliation or revenge. It is here that he offers a picture of an imprisoned tiger utterly incapable of translating his feelings into reality. He asked forgiveness though he has not committed any sinful act. Dr. G.S. Balarama Gupta has observed:

The climax of the novel, the incident where in Bakha ‘touches’ Lallaji, is specially significant for the slap dealt on Bakha’s face is symbolic not only of all the cruelty to which untouchables are subjected, but of the scornful treatment meted out to the underprivileged all over the world, as, for instance, the Negroes in the USA.
Bakha stood still, his turban fallen on the ground and his poor jellebies scattered in the dust. At this critical juncture, nobody had a kind word for him except a tongawalla who tries to console Bakha. After this serious incident Anand vividly describes Bakha’s feeling which emerged in him as a result of utter humiliation:

He stood aghast. Then his whole countenance lit with fire and his hands were no more joined. Tears welled up in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. The cumulated strength of his giant body glistened in him with the desire for revenge, while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame... his feelings would rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire in fitful jerks when the recollection of abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him.13

The scene of the cruelty of the crowd and the man who hit him flashes before his mind. But Bakha immediately realizes his actual position in the world. The burning of excrement is symbolically seen not as an uncomplicated activity but as an avowal of Bakha’s un-cleanliness and spiritual degradation, and as a social illustration of his moral identification with filth. There is a vital contrast between Bakha and the so-called infallible tradition. In his social cosmos, man is governed by traditions and taboos imposed on him. However, beyond the levels of social superficiality there is a contrast between the human truth and a cosmic life. Bakha’s touching of the Hindu merchant is of no consequence when contrasted with and considered within the social hierarchy and religious value system of the Hindu tradition.

The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused? The sentry inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hated it too. That’s why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines everyday. That’s why they don’t touch us, the high-castes.14
The incident, however, proves to be a great turning point in Bakha's life as it brings to him a new realization of his social position. Believing in an amoral world in which man is a mere automaton, the naturalist tries to define man's exact position in the universe. The affirmation of man in a deterministic universe is what the novelist seeks to portray here. He believed that nature was completely indifferent to man's plight and thus man's salvation rested with him. It comes to him as a ray of light piercing through the darkness, and for the first time gives him a painful awareness of his lot which he expresses in the following words:

> It is only the Hindus, and the outcastes who are not sweeper. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable: untouchable: untouchable: that's the word: untouchable: I am an untouchable. Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawned upon him.  

With this new realization of his social position he starts reflecting critically over the things that took place earlier. This consciousness is specially reflected after Bakha is hooted out of the temple for his alleged crime of defiling it. It is because of the new understanding that he is fired with anger and revenge when he comes to know about the priest's sinister attempt to seduce his sister. It is a fact that even after the newly acquired intuition; he can not oversteps the barriers of the conventions built to protect a man like priest from attacking by a low-caste. Though he regrets for not killing the Brahmin priest, he is still gripped with fear as reflected below:

> A superb specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like a tiger at bay. And yet there was a futility written on his face. He could not over-step the barriers which the conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weakness against him. He could not invade the magic circle
which protects a priest from attack by anybody, especially by a low-caste man. 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.\textsuperscript{16}

He encounters a deterministic universe which does not even recognize the identity of individuals. The two incidents – Bakha’s touching of the Hindu priest and the attempt of the priest to molest his sister, Sohini are instrumental factors in spoiling subsequent pleasant incident like a hockey match, a country walk and a wedding. Bakha’s sense of outrage against such incidents and his inability to react effectively has rightly been analysed by Jane Powers:

Bakha’s own fear is overcome by outrage at his sister’s harassment by the temple priest. His innate nobility rouses him to protect his sister’s honour; he is moved by her silence and subtle modesty and could not think of her being brutalized by anyone. The emotions warring within him result from his outcast status. Full of high resource to speak and act, he can not overstep the barriers......\textsuperscript{17}

The validity of Bakha’s moral figure, however, lies in the central conflict, in his oscillation between rage and despair. Beyond the horizon is the radiant world of the sun. But the gloom of the present is all about him. He must either cling to the hopes of the future, or else sink into the inert existence which is his destiny. His choice is to live between the sun and the slum. The sun imagery is dexterously built. The sun represents the potentiality of life, and takes on the status of a key symbol:

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.\(^8\)

The hero’s adventure is mapped out in terms of the sun’s progress in the sky. A, places of freedom and release, the field and the sun are the same. The morning sun starts the rhythm of life, the alpha of existence; the afternoon marks its waning, the omega of existence. The sun, thus, becomes the dominant symbol of the nature of human experience.

Though one of the explicit reasons attributed to Bakha’s failure to act or retaliate in a dignified manner in his defence is apparently his awareness that over stepping the walls of convention that has been laid upon him by the upper castes was not easy. It can not be overlooked that Anand does not want his protagonist to assert himself in a challenging way. The realism of socio-cultural values of the time and in keeping with the novelist’s own scheme of things that Bakha is shown as a weak character even when he knows that he is being victimized by the upper class people. Bakha’s inability to fight back is again exposed when he accepts the bread given by the housewife albeit in an insulting way. She scolds him and hurls some chapattis down from the fourth floor of the building. Bakha picks them up and walks off with disgust overwhelming him:

\[
\text{Vay Bakha, take this, here’s your bread coming down.}
\text{And she flung it at him... he picked it up quietly and wrapped it in a duster with the other things he had there. He was too disgusted to clean the drain after this, especially as the little boy sat relieving himself before him. He threw the little broom aside and made off.}^{19}\]

The last incident which provokes Bakha, happened when a little high-caste child was injured in the match which was being played and Bakha lifts him up in silent
sympathy. Even this act of his is misconstructed by the boy’s mother, who blames him for polluting her son. Prof. R. S. Singh has rightly observed here:

They refused to recognize his sentiments and even his acts of kindness. Even when he saved the child from the accident and brought him back to his caste mother, he was not praised for endangering his life to help the child. On the contrary, he was condemned for polluting the child by lifting him in his lap.¹⁰

Bakha finds humiliation is neither the result of his poverty nor the dirty work as such, but the utter denial of his humanity and his being reduced to a sub-human creature that can contaminate other humans. The tragedy of Bakha becomes all the more poignant as Anand skillfully makes him ‘an expansive hero in a closed world.’ His comment is that “the tragedy of my hero (Bakha) lay in the fact that he was never allowed to attain anything near the potentials of his qualities of manhood.”²¹ Bakha’s world is much too narrow for his aspirations. Feeling quite detached from the human world, Bakha is swamped by the merest sight of the open field that spread before him as the curve of his soul seemed to yearn for the heights. He longs for a new world but could not reach out to it. This causes a profound ache in his soul. Anand comments on this discord:

It was a queer picture of awe and romance, the alternation of his hatred for his own town and the love for the world to which he looked out .... The mind which has once peeped into the wonderland of the new, contemplated various aspects of it with longing and desire, is shocked and disappointed when living reality pulls in the reins of the wild horse of fancy... he had built up a new world, which was his heaven, if not for nothing else, because it represented a change from the ossified order and the stagnant pools of the lane near which he was born.²²
Bakha is very much aware of the discord between the world he is condemned to inhabit and the new world of his undying aspirations. He tried hard in vain to be in harmony with himself but soon realizes that he is an alien, and outsider who can not belong. He is extra ordinarily sensitive to the fact that he can never go where there is no place for him. He experiences existential angst on the lines of Camus:

It happens that the stage – sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day, the ‘why’ arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. ‘Begins’ – this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness.23

This birth of a new enlightenment in Bakha results from his touching of a caste Hindu and his being slapped by the latter and subjected to the most inhuman treatment before a crowd of people. It is this fateful accident that opens his eyes for the first times and lets him have vague glimpses into the real meaning of his own self, his own place in society: “For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable. Untouchable! That’s the word; Untouchable; I am an Untouchable!” It becomes a crucial moment of realization when Bakha fully understands his place in the social order:

Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawns upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that had happened to him traces its course upto this light and got the answer.24

From this moment of self realization, which is testing step towards maturity, begins the ostracized hero’s spiritual voyaged towards a new destination. These are the
episodes in the drama of Bakha's psychological tragedy as determined by social dictates. He cannot enjoy a walk, for:

Heredity furrowed no deep grooves in his soul where flowers could grow or grass abound. The cumulative influence of careful selection had imprisoned his free will in the shackles of slavery to dreary routine of one occupational environment. He could not reach out from the narrow and limited personality he had inherited to his larger yearning. It was a discord between person and circumstances.

Bakha's misery reaches its zenith when his father chastises and turns him out of the house. As a sequel to the events of the day, Bakha wanders homeless in the plains.

Later when he returns home in the evening, there emerged three possible solutions to the problem of untouchability, a social malaise corroding the souls of millions like him. The solution is the conversion to Christianity. Hutchinson, the padre of the Salvation Army proposes to baptize Bakha in order to remove the stigma of caste. His meeting with the Salvationist missionary comes as a turning point, who Christ is, defies his understanding. Bakha instinctively turns to Gandhi who identified himself with the untouchable by declaring that he wishes to be reborn as an untouchable but Bakha finds something mystical about Mahatma's solutions. He wants a more comprehensible method, and the poet, Iqbal Nath Sarshar, suggests rapid industrialization of the country which means a definite destruction of the soulless system of castes. With all his orthodoxy, Gandhi recognized the evil when he said:

While we are asking for freedom from the grip of foreign nation, we have, ourselves, for centuries, trampled under-foot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity.
The novel ends on a note of calm acceptance. Although the conflict in his soul between hope for the future and the present condition is not yet over, Bakha feels soothed for the time being by both Gandhi's deep empathy for the untouchables and the poet's technological solution to their problem. He is willing to wait patiently for his eventual emancipation. Bakha's feelings, however, reflect mainly his own character and experience – his inner suffering, his humanity, his innocence, his hope rather than indicate the certainty of any solution.

Bakha experiences the profound sense of alienation when he is amidst the sea of humanity waiting for Gandhi:

There was an inseparable barrier between himself and the crowd, the barrier of caste. He was part of a consciousness which he could share and yet not understand. He had been lifted from the gutter, through the barriers of space, to partake of a life which was his, and yet not his. He was in the midst of a humanity which included him in its fold, and yet debarred him from entering into a sentient living quivering contact with it.\(^27\)

The living contact is impossible within his narrow circle. He can not share his views with others not even with his father and thus had to totally suppress his emotions. He finds that he has no way out.

The treatment meted out to Bakha exposes the apex of the humiliation at the hands of the upper castes. But Bakha is unable to react with intense resentment which has not been appreciated by some critics. They fault Anand in terms of his
failure to send the right massage of assertive protest in the context of new emergent realities of the thirties.

Bakha’s submission and subservience to superior caste people seems something that he has inherited from his forefathers. The extent of servility and passive contentment can be gauged from the sense of his gratitude to Charat Singh after receiving the hockey stick;

He was grateful, grateful, haltingly grateful, flatteringly grateful, stumblingly grateful, so grateful that he did not know how he could walk ten yards to the corner to be out of sight of his benevolent and generous host. The whole atmosphere was charged with embarrassment. He felt uncomfortable as he walked away. Strange! strange! Wonderful kind of man! I did not know he was so kind. I should have known. He always has such a humorous way about him! Kind, Good man! He gave me a new stick, a brand-new stick!

This kind of gratitude on the part of Bakha shows his habitual submission to the superior caste people who never show any hesitation in insulting him and the vast majority of outcastes. Moreover, Bakha’s father boosts his submissiveness by constantly reminding him that there exists a different between the poor and the rich; and that the people like themselves were not supposed to invade the circle of rich. Bakha’s sense of slavery becomes more entrenched when he cannot assert himself even in the greatest moment of his strength because of the traditional restrictions. All his mute longings for education are never fulfilled:

He wept and cried to be allowed to school. But then his father had told him that the schools were meant for the Babus, not for the bhangis. He had not quite understood the reason for that, then …….. later, at the British barracks, he realized why his father had not
sent him to school. He was a sweeper’s son and could never be a Babu. Later still, he realized that there was no school which would admit him, because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of a sweeper’s son.

The incidents of polluting a passer-by and the attempt by the priest to seduce his sister jolt Bakha’s consciousness, yet his new maturity does not lead him to any rebellious behaviour. This becomes obvious when he starts reflecting on and off on the words of Gandhi while returning home after hearing what Gandhi had to say about the untouchables. Instead of showing his resentment to the repressive caste system, he is attracted by the solution offered by the poet who combines Gandhi’s compassionate vision and the machine:

The Mahatma had talked of a Brahmin boy who did the scavenging in his ashram. Did he mean, then that I should go on scavenging? Bakha asked himself. ‘Yes’ came the forceful answer. ‘Yes’ said Bakha. ‘I shall go on doing what Gandhi says.’ ‘But shall I never be able to leave the latrines?’ Came the disturbing thought. But I can, Did not that poet say there is a machine which can do my work? The prospect of never being able to wear clothes that the Sahibs wore, of never being able to become a sahib was horrible. ‘But it does not matter,’ he said to console himself.

Bakha is ultimately reconciled to the Gandhian formula as suggested by the poet. His desire to be a sahib, to wear clothes like a gentleman do not materialize. He takes a conciliatory submissive attitude towards not being able to fulfill his desires. However, some critics feel that it is the novelist’s who limits his characters within the Gandhian framework. P.K. Rajan analyses thus:

And when the novel closes, it is to the poet that Bakha wants to go to seek his salvation, because the combines Gandhi’s compassionate vision with the machine which is symbolic of modernity...The poet advocates modernization through industrialization within the
framework of Gandhian outlook. This indeed is the message or thesis of Untouchable, and as William Walsh rightly points out, it is the poet's solution which is most favoured by Anand. Even though Bakha does not understand the poet's words fully, he knows that the poet has been answering the most intimate question in his soul.31

The weakness of The Untouchable (1935) lies in the fact that in spite of Bakha's many human qualities, and his self awareness, his passive character cripples his reaction to the beastly treatment meted out to him. Though one can feel that the novel end on a note of hope, for future social change, it does not appear to be very convincing. Bakha's character fails to give any encouragement to the socially deprived people. His timid and submissive attitude is the result of his inherited inferiority shaped by the traditional regulations imposed upon him. He has been moulded by his parents and the society to accept the situation and this bars him to a show of boldness when required. All these instances amply indicate that Bakha has not been able to shake off the sense of servility and meekness that weigh heavily on him which in turn makes his destiny. The social heredity of caste-system prevents him in doing whatever he wants thus making him a victim of naturalism. Whenever he faces a humiliating situation, and thinks in terms of reacting boldly, he is called back and reminded of his inferior position and retracts sheepishly as is shown in the following lines when he is falsely accused of polluting the priest who had made an attempt to molest his sister. Saroj Cowasjee comment:

At such moment he appears, we are told, 'a superb specimen of humanity,' 'his fine form rising as a tiger at bay.' But he is a tiger in a cage, securely imprisoned by the conventions of his superiors have built up to protect themselves against the fury of those whom they exploit. The instinctive anger gives way, and the slave in him asserts itself... 32
All these evidences reveal that Bakha is deeply bound to his low caste status throughout the novel is not capable of recognizing that he has a creative role to play in the amelioration of his condition. He feels strongly sensitive; but when it comes to a concrete action, he seems to lapse into passivity or acquiescence. Though Anand sets out to pillory, Hindu society for its cruelty and insensitivity with great fanfare, the end result is a mere whimper. Bakha is no doubt a victim of circumstances beyond his control because of his own caste heredity, but nothing could stop him in his unwillingness to accept his lot and put up a fight against the social wrongs unjustly heaped on him. However, a sense of protest there might be in Bakha’s conscience, it is allowed to peter out.

Bakha is caught between a world which despises him and a will to fight against it to keep himself whole. There is also a firm faith in him that the life he is doomed to live is monstrously unjust. It is obvious, what the novelist trying to convey is that work is what one makes of it. It is not the nature of work, but the spirit in which it was performed that made the difference. What is required is an attitudinal change. This kind of instinctive importance given to work by Bakha is to be promoted in order that the Indian society as a whole may progress since it is through action that one can achieve the value of self-esteem, which he would be otherwise denied to within a system seemingly intent on degrading him. What Anand emphasized is that an untouchable can possibly overcome the injustices inherent in his work through the importance that any indispensable work attaches to itself. Bakha’s case exemplifies a situation in which the ethic of work alone can eliminate
social alienation, even social ostracism. The conversion of latrines to the flush system is the third solution proposed by Anand. The absence of drainage system as the root cause for the polluted atmosphere is hinted at even at the beginning of the novel and the solution of the water-closet system is offered in the last part. It draws attention to the fact that by performing the degrading works assigned to him by an oppressive system, the untouchable in India is in a sense perpetuating untouchability. This suggested solution that of flush system could eliminate the need for the performance of such humiliating jobs and that could lead to a change in the status of the workers concerned.

In this novel Anand lays great emphasis on actions rather than on ideas. Since actions are the primary concrete reality. He steers clear of proposing any philosophical or intellectual solution to problems which are primarily those of existence. What is implied by the very dynamics of the novel is the need for promoting an instinctive awareness of the importance of action and perhaps a corresponding distrust of abstract propositions put forward as solutions. Indeed what determines the logic of the narrative in this novel is a belief in ethical socialism which Gandhi himself advocated – a form of socialism which is in tune with India’s mystic inheritance so far as the institutional aspect of life is concerned. Though Anand has been dubbed as a Marxist by some critics, his socialist sympathies are attuned to the ethical rather than the political. That is why ethical socialism may be expected to offer a possible solution to the problem of untouchability in India.
The Untouchable (1935) may be regarded as a classic since it brings into sharp focus what has proved debilitating to Indian society in general, and Hindu society in particular encompassing several issues affecting the condition of man not only in India but also else where in the world. The novel explores the possibilities of inter-personal relations between untouchables and high caste Hindus considered in existential terms. What emerges is a kind of message that untouchability cannot possibly be eradicated from India unless the Indians are informed by the philosophy – man with man, since any other ordering of the relationship between the two would prove frustrating. In highlighting the crisis occurring in the course of a day in Bakha’s life, Anand’s purpose is to analyze the existential structure of the untouchable’s predicament. However, Anand does appear to have paid enough attention to one profound aspect of the situation in The Untouchable(1935), that of his having to recourse to a kind of double-consciousness, that is, the sense of the untouchable looking at himself through the eyes of high-caste Hindus of measuring “One’s soul by tape of a world that looks on in contempt and pity” which is bound to give rise to a disastrous division within the self. Bakha’s predicament would have been all the more meaningful if the growth in his awareness which is sought to be plotted by the novel had been rendered more explicit through a expose of his psyche.

The Untouchable (1935) describes a child of modern India shackled by the age-old tradition and Bakha is a perfect individual whose excellence is flawed by his low-caste for which he is not responsible. All the episodes of humiliation reveal how unjustly the untouchables are treated by the caste-Hindus. Though dissatisfied with
his lot, Bakha made desperate attempts to cope with it but his revolutionary feelings lie buried in his heart. He was aware of his limitations of the given social structure and is also ready to acknowledge the rising rebellion within him but in the absence of any perceptible alternative, he is unable to translate that protest into action. Between the struggle of the individual and society, Bakha is always defeated and his potentiality to register his protest becomes less pronounced. This defeat is a submission to the tradition and the established norms, rather than defeat of his conscience.

Eventually, the end of the novel shows Bakha the protagonist, not only fearful and simple but also totally incapable of the confrontationist spirit needed to survive in a society which is against people like him. Anand has emphasized the process of Bakha’s victimization rather than suggesting his creative role in society.

Bakha accepts all humiliations and sufferings with meek submission or without any visible protest. It is due to deeply embedded class-consciousness on the part of the protagonist that the novel ends without any specific solution to the basic problem, and the organically evolved pessimism envelopes Bakha’s life. His looking forward to the future in a positive and constructive manner does not hold much water as this factor lacks essential intellectual understanding of the system of thought. Perhaps, one excuse for Bakha’s passivity is that the burden of centuries proved too much for him to think of a final and clear cut resolution. This burden, an inherited social heredity stiffs his spirit of rebellion.
Anand in this novel emphasized man alienated in an absurd world, the individual estranged from society, the individual’s isolation and his consequent feelings of anxiety and anguish, his assertion of personal freedom. *The Untouchable* (1935) pictures the epic struggle of the individual Bakha to release himself from the communal customs and beliefs which circumvent his destiny. The conflict between social heredity and the individual forces him to experience a type of self-exile. Bakha’s alienation is the result of the social ostracism. Mulk Raj Anand has portrayed Bakha as emerging from the old fatalism into a sensitive new world of freedom. Bakha learns the doctrine of struggle which becomes a universal gesture of protest as he is persecuted by the individuals and society. He becomes a mere plaything, a tool in the hands of destiny as he succumbs to the social cosmos governed by traditions and taboos.

In the given circumstances, it is not only expedient but urgently imperative that those inhuman caste-prejudices which had eroded cohesiveness and unity of Indian society are cast off. Gandhi’s program of action for the eradication of untouchability was, therefore, an integral part of his larger political struggle. By using the symbol of the machine, he suggested that scientific thinking would change the attitude and practices of the whole society, but keeping in view the ground reality of Indian society, it is only natural to expect that Bakha should have been presented as a man devoid of the ideological knowledge in the absence of which he could not develop a revolutionary spirit. Alastair Niven’s comment in this regard seems quite relevant:
He is philosophically placed the unalterable mystic of his society imprisons him, and he knows it. That is why at the end of the novel after he was encountered a Gandhi spokesman, a Christian and a socialist, he can still see no possibility for change. The concept of his society are spiritual ones, not practical and are therefore, infinitely unlikely to be altered.34

*The Untouchable (1935)* is thus, forthright in its condemnation of a system that kills human dignity and rapes the mind of man. An intellectual aristocracy, based on the conceits of the pundits, caste seems to have a steel framework which throttles the individual by stopping his further progress. Amaury De Reincourt remarks with reference to the rigidity of caste system in India:

> Caste was the final mechanization of Hindu life, implying the complete identification of every man with social role and consequently the mutilation of his individual personality.35

Modern technological civilization is effectively antidotal to the poisonous atmosphere created by the traditional caste system. Social heredity constantly casts obstacles in the way of man, who is caught in a web of frustration and indecision. Cosmic determinism may limit man’s total freedom, but social determinism in a way, completely abolishes whatever freedom of action he has been granted thus shaping his complete destiny.

The problem of social heredity which involves untouchability is evident when Anand, after twenty six years of publication of *Untouchable (1935)* returns to the same theme; yet again in another novel *The Road (1963)* where he dramatizes the destiny of an untouchable called Bhikhu, who is a new Bakha in a changed
situation. The quarter of a century that separates the two novels meant a lot of difference but not in the content of social naturalism which shapes the life of a man.

Mulk Raj Anand found that even after the British imperialists left India and Indian people achieved self-rule, not much has changed. The heredity of caste system still persists so also the exploitation of the weaker section in a Hindu society still continues. In a letter to Cowasjee Anand explains:

Well it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, twenty miles from Delhi, in a human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru, to find that the outcastes, not only in South India, but in the mixed North were still consigned to the limbo of oblivion. There was something tragi-comic to me in the fact that the caste Hindu would not touch the stone quarried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had been touched by the untouchable when I mentioned this to the great Nehru. He did not believe me. He was quite angry at my mentioning this awakening fact. I said I would prove it to him by showing it to him in the "enchanted mirror."  

Anand’s writing of this novel on the same theme which he used in his earlier novels during thirties shows that even now he was emotionally involved with this problem of untouchability. He feels that the mere legislating of laws against this social evil is not a viable solution for social change. He felt that complexity of caste heredity or untouchability can be overcome only by appealing to the hearts of the privilege people who are responsible for perpetuating this inhuman crime. He believed that the immoral practice could be eradicated only by educating people. However, he does not go to the extent of advocating an over all revolution of the social problem.
The recurrence of the theme in Anand’s work points to its perennial significance especially because it involves a large section of Indian populace to whose condition India’s attainment of Independence has made little difference. It is difficult to agree with M.K. Naik’s view that Anand has failed to give a memorable picture of a changed Bakha in a changed world since the principle thrust of the novel is to suggest that the changed world has indeed spelled no significant change in an untouchable’s condition. What is significant in the novel is that it views Bhikhu’s situation is expressive of the chronic malaise with which the Indian society is stricken. The malaise which makes it difficult for him to survive with dignity and with unimpaired self esteem Bhikhu has to contend with the ideology of a power structure which tends to perpetuate itself through the maintenance of the status-quo which is the reason why despite his resentment and attempt to seek expression for his rebellious spirit he finds himself fighting a losing battle. Indeed the road to emancipation from degradation will not be built so long as conditions remain as what they are. Moreover, it implies that the road to freedom is long enough to break his spirit. It needs to be noted that the road becomes the central metaphor of this novel framing the issue of caste-heredity with which the protagonist has to contend.

The creation of Bhikhu as the hero of the novel reveals a basic incongruity which affects the vividness and authenticity of the character-portrayal-an incongruity arising from his growing passivity in the face of a challenging reality. This incongruity, however, is traceable to the author’s own basic dichotomous between a highly compassionate comprehension of the reality of the untouchables’ tragic plight
and their historically conditioned inability to give a consciously dynamic role to the underdogs themselves. If Bakha of *The Untouchable (1935)* is a passive character, there is at least the justification that his consciousness corresponds to the general consciousness of the Indian untouchables of the 1930s but during the quarter century that follows, there culminates in Bhikhu, a new untouchable, the whole structure of rural reality with its inner dialectic resulting in changed relations and attitudes, new frustration, struggles and hopes. The gradual breakdown of feudalist values with its accompanying sighs and tears; the aspirations raised by a newly won freedom and the frustrations over the fond dreams that gradually melt away. The freedom that a political democracy offers and the ever-expanding awareness of the individual’s rights the discovery of new horizons through the spread of education and a new wave of enlightenment and the gradual resurrection of the lowly and the deprived; the struggles against an old myth not yet dead and the pangs of a new myth powerless to be born; the rapid growth of organized movements for a better life in all walks and the resulting tension – all these are deeply ingrained in the new reality with which Bhikhu contends. Obviously, the tremendous complexity of this reality cannot be communicated by means of the same devices as employed for tracing Bakha’s awareness of self in *Untouchable (1935)*. Anand is fully conscious of this difference and tries as M.K. Naik points out, “out to shift the focus from the consciousness of the protagonist to the entire village.” Thus unlike Bakha, Bhikhu is not the central point of interest in the novel; the focal point is in fact the whole village community of untouchables. That is why S.C. Harrex describes the situation in *The Road (1963)* as “the social martyrdom” of the village untouchables. But this
change in focus notwithstanding, it is mainly through Bhikhu as the leader of all untouchables, that the "social martyrdom" unfolds itself in the novel.

The novel begins with the government's decision to build the road connecting the city to village of Govardhan where plenty of milk and vegetables are produced. Though the road would mean prosperity for the village, the landlord Shaken Singh and his men opposed it as they cannot tolerate the idea of the untouchables like Bhikhu taking part in the construction and drawing wages just like the caste Hindus. Then there emerged two opposing factions: one led by Lambardar Dhooli Singh who, though a Hindu caste himself, is inspired by the teachings of Gandhi regarding the questions of untouchability. The high-caste Hindus complain that low ones sit bloated and yawn and they entertain a short of fear concerning the possibility of the untouchables being able to buy the status of the 'the twice-born' as a result of their new found affluence. As the money wage prevent the direct control of the outcastes by the so-called superiors, the latter bemoan the loss of the so-called togetherness. It is apparent that a sense of insecurity has been generated by the new conditions that prevail as a result of governmental action and the enlargement of avenues of employment for the untouchables, such as road building. In a way it seems welcome because it could perhaps lead to a new awareness on the part of the high-caste Hindus of the implications of the changes occurring in their milieu. In other words the novel stresses the need for shaking the high-caste Hindus out of their complacency in order that they might reorder their attitudes towards the untouchables. Anand employs the absurdities perpetrated the blind prejudices of the
high-castes which is evident when the priest provokes the reactionary element when a democratic government starts taking progressive measures:

"Sarpanch Thakur Singh" began the priest flatteringly, "as the head of the Panchayat; you have to show good sense. These people are condemned by their Karma to work out their doom among the flies and dusts of their huts. The rock of their thatched roofs, and the stifling heat, is punishment enough for them. And, our people are wrong in openly refusing to break the stones touched by the Harijans. It is easier for you to flee out of fire than for them to escape from their bad deeds. Always, they will remain tainted by their past deeds, but you are twice-born ... Now, a purificatory ceremony is necessary. And the shadow of the evils stars that is on your family can only be cured by a special puja." 38

The Landlord gazed at the face of the priest, unable to believe that Suraj Mani could adroitly manipulate such a situation to his advantage by condemning the untouchables.

Compared to the humiliation that Bakha has to meet in the earlier novel the horror that Bhikhu confronts in *The Road (1963)* are much more devastating and cruel. For instance in the beginning of the novel when Bhikhu and his aged mother went to the temple, his mother’s way to the temple is barred by the Landlord Thakur Singh’s son Sajnu and his comrades. Bhikhu appears firm and defiant, but later he gradually loses even the strength of his defiance and become a passive figure gripped by a debilitating sense of futility. When the Chamars build the road to the town, Bhikhu does not understand the anger of the high-caste Hindus. “They had never disallowed him to walk on the village earth even if he could never go into the temple.” 39 His soul is subdued and his desires are suppressed within him. The era of
The Road (1945) is not very different from the social milieu of Untouchable (1935). The law of the land has not influenced the attitude of the society. As in Untouchable (1935), in this novel also the caste Hindus ill-treat their caste brethren. They are not allowed to come into physical contact with the ‘twice born’, or permitted to enter the temple debarring them from coming into contact with the God of all. This is indeed the main thrust of the portrayal of naturalism in The Road (1963) where Bhikhu, the protagonist of the novel is deprived of his historical truth on account of the limitations of his caste position.

The horror of the practice of untouchability, the taboo against the untouchables’ entry into the temples, the hypocrisy and malice of priests who pretend to be the spiritual fathers, the dominant role of landlordism in the rural social structure, the dangerous prejudices of the high-caste men against the outcastes and their capacity for hatred and cruelty against them. This dramatization of the decadent feudal ethics also shows the egos, fears and anxieties of the upper caste men whose psychic condition is best expressed in the following words of landlord Thakur Singh to Dhooli Singh:

“And now these Chamar boys re earning wages and walking on the heart of our whole caste brotherhood... Do you realize that you will have to marry daughter to a chamar and your son to a sweeper woman – if you persist in this course?"

While this psychic condition incites the high-caste men to resort to brutal atrocities against the untouchable families, the untouchables themselves are in deep hells of their life in death existence from which their escape seems too remote a possibility. The Road (1963) portrays with powerful realism of their pathetic state. Utter
dehumanization, and the way they are barred from doing things, the inhuman cruelty with which their huts are burnt down, slavish submission with which they obey the high-caste men and their deep-seated fatalism. When the huts of the chamars are set on fire, Bhikhu enters the flame and brings out the dead goat. The atrocities perpetuated on the lower sections of the society can also be observed from the words of Sajnu:

I supposed you think I am bad, but as you say, those chamars must be taught the lessons of their lives. Both Lachman and I can go, ask their families to leave, since the land on which these huts stand belongs to both our house.⁴¹

The burning of the untouchables’ hut, including his own, by Sajnu and Lachman resulting in the total destruction of whatever belongings they have in the world. Even then it does not incite him to retaliation; instead it only reminds him of the suffering that is inescapable for the untouchables.

Strong and sincere but calm, he was too spiritually pure to hate; and had learnt, through long submission, to endure evil and violence from the upper castes, without protest, only hoping that, through work and more work, he would be liberated, somehow, he did not know how.⁴²

Religion has played its role in exploiting the untouchables. As there is an illusion of ‘equality before law’ and the outcaste has neither the money nor the time to go to a court of law. Bhikhu bereft and confused, broods thoughtlessly on the memories of the other humiliations he had suffered before they had set fire to the houses.

In *The Road* (1963) as in the *Untouchable* (1935), there is a slapping incident which again added to Bhikhu’s mounting pressures and humiliation. This
happens when the thirsty Bhikhu accepts a tumbler of water from Rukmani, the beautiful daughter of Thakur Singh. Her brother Sajnu, who hates all the untouchables sees this and rushes towards Bhikhu and slaps him for defiling the tumbler:

There was no one in the hall, as he entered through the big curved doorway. He asked for drinking water. Rukmani gives him water in a brass cup. Sajnu kicked the brass cup from Bhikhu's hand and sent it fleeing. Our whole house will have to be purified.  

Like his prototype Bakha, Bhikhu for a moment thinks of retaliating but common sense warns him of the perilous consequence in which he and the other untouchables struggle even after fourteen years of Indian Independence:

Bhikhu got up, his hands uplifted... He stretched out to his full height again, till the landlord's son cowered back. Then he felt he must withdraw before either hand should strike.

He wiped the smear of blood from his torn lips, turned round deliberately, swallowed his spittle and walked out of the hall. Having been humiliated again he changed his direction. He did not go towards home. Instinctively he went in the direction of the road he had helped to build. And in his soul he took the path out of the village, towards Gurgaon, which was the way to Delhi town:

Instinctively he went in the direction of the road he had helped to build. And in his soul he took the direction, out of the village, towards Gurgaon, which was the way to Delhi town, capital of Hinduism, where no one knew who he was and where there would be no castes or outcaste.

The upper castes' intransigent attitude to the changed social situation is evident as Anand ironically brings out prejudices meted against the untouchables. It is proved in their refusing to touch the stones quarried by the untouchables, while enjoying the
yield of the fields tilled by them. Pandit Suraj Mani’s plan to carry with him a little earth to avoid treading on what has been soiled by the untouchables sounds highly irrational and absurd. In all such cases it is the hollowness of faith or hypocrisy that is focused on since Suraj Mani readily accepts the mangoes plugged by the untouchables saying, “sweet is the fruit of Lambardar Dhooli Singh’s grove.” That is why the attempts made to justify the treatment given out to the untouchables by the high-castes appears ridiculous and pathetic. Even Dhooli Singh, who appears as a liberal humanist in the novel, has pre conditional communal feelings as he exhibits a certain timidity when it comes to the question of possibility of his daughter being drawn to an untouchable. Despite his touching confidence, in his daughter that she will not set her affections on the man, he exhibits a certain ambivalence in his attitude towards the untouchables. In their shallowness the high-castes appears to mix up religion, politics and social life in their vehement insistence on pollution by touch, pollution from distance or on the theory of Karma attributing the sufferings of the untouchables to punishment divinely ordained for their bad deeds in their previous births thereby advocated at least theoretically that the lower caste should submit themselves to every blow and kick the upper castes give them at every step of their life with humility for the sake of caste promotion in their next birth.

The Road (1963) is indeed a symbol of Bhikhu’s own fulfillment through labour, and, it shows how he discovers that his own alienated being can be overcome through labour. This view of the symbolic ending of The Road (1963), however, seems to be a limited one because the heroes act of attempting a philosophical integration of liberation through labour. Bhikhu is stated as taking the road which
would lead him to Delhi town, India's capital, where he can merge into an anonymity and where there is no caste or outcaste. The implication is that he is leaving his village once and for all and hopes to reach the town of Delhi where liberation will become a reality because he will have to confront no more the oppressive social forces of his erstwhile life. Here Bhikhu's final act becomes almost an act of escape.

Premilla Paul comments:

> At a time when modernity that has scant regards for caste distinction is to be ushered into the village, Bhikhu's choice to quit the place and to merge into the anonymity of the city is puzzling.46

Yet those critics who consider the road as a symbol of liberation and hope for Bhikhu hold the view that what is likely to happen to him in Delhi is of no relevance, the only point of importance being that so long as the road is there, there is hope for him.

Thus, Jagdish Shivpuri explains:

> He (Bhikhu) walks away as a king walks away from his kingdom, but he walks away to fresh fields and pastures new. For he is sure of hand and confident in the heart. He is a man who has seen the dawn from the top of the mountain while the jackals he leaves behind are still in the darkness of the valley of habitual custom. This is the great victory of the novelist and he transforms a failure into a victory.47

Even M. K. Naik who is highly critical of *The Road (1963)* is of the view that the road to Delhi which Bhikhu takes at the end of *The Road (1963)* is indeed a road to Destiny. He, however, does not think that the symbolism at the end of the novel has been rendered effectively. He says:

> ...this finale, which should have come as a fitting symbolic climax to the narrative, loses all its artistic power as the superstructure of this long short story is too flimsy to bear the weight of an effective symbolic finale.48
Naik thus attributes the failure of the symbol to the flimsiness of the superstructure of the narrative Saros Cowasjee dismisses it as an effective symbol since it does not suggest a viable solution. Cowasjee argues that since the novel shows that the Government is utterly indifferent to the conditions of the untouchables “the ‘road to Delhi town, the capital of Hindustan’ can hardly lead to an effective solution. And if it is not an effective solution, it cannot be a major symbol.” All these critical views, in a nutshell, illustrate the way the finale of the novel has generated opposing opinions regarding its meaning as an artistic device. This is mainly because this symbolic finale is in its essence ambiguous and confusing.

We are kept in the dark as to what is in store for Bhikhu in Delhi. Delhi the seat of the Government that has failed to take the necessary action against incendiaryism can not be expected to offer any effective solution. But according to Bhikhu, Delhi is an ideal world that entertains no caste distinctions Bakha in Untouchable (1935) returns home in order to announce the possible hope offered by the modern machine. On the contrary, Bhikhu fails to think in terms of his community or village. In a fit of despair, he seeks salvation for himself and escapes into modernity. The road to Delhi therefore, appears to be the road to freedom from caste oppression. Whether Delhi could fulfill his expectations or not is not what matters because the significance lies in its being able to kindle hope in him. The road that he traverses may not lead him anywhere but so long as the road is there, there is hope for him. Anand is not concerned with offering any solution to what appears to
be an intractable problem: in fact the distinction lies primarily in his being able to
define it in all its complexity and relevance to the predicament of Indians.

Significantly, the novel ends with the hero heading for Delhi; which is not only the capital of country, the hub of all the activities, but also the degrading centre for the life of the nation. This ending however makes Anand’s views ambiguous. The symbolic end is part of the novelist’s own projection of his own desired image. It therefore, follows that in the desired reality of the novelist, Bhikhu’s salvation lies not in his remaining in the village in the midst of the jackals, but in going away to the unknown place where there is social harmony and peace. It is as though Bhikhu was leaving for a holy place where at last he could hoped to attain peace. But Bakha of Untouchable (1935) with all his confusion returns home in the end to tell his father all about what he had heard. But in the finale of The Road (1963), the presence of a concept of freedom with its internal contradiction – the freedom an individual sought to attain disregarding of the freedom of the community to which the individual belongs. In fact, Bhikhu can achieve his real freedom only through his community of untouchables, but he gets himself severed from these communal aspirations and goes in search of an illusory freedom for himself even when the road is completed. Perhaps the only explanation for this could be that when Bhikhu sees his achievement of the successful construction of the road, instead of appreciation, it elicits only insults, he realizes the futility of his endeavour and infers that real progress is impossible for them without the removal of insidious distinction between the Brahmins and the Bhangis.

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It is evident that Bhikhu works out his own salvation with diligence. The road thus stands for the way out of the hell one has built for himself. Bhikhu visualizes a heaven which may not yet be attainable, for custom, superstition, and habit hang like a dead weight, clouding one’s vision. The golden dream of a classless and casteless society may remain in the realm of possibility. At least, Bhikhu makes an honest effort to transform a dream into reality. The hero represents the authentic voice of his creator. As the mouthpiece of the creative idea underlying the novel, he stands twice removed, from reality; he has none of the human naturalness that characterizes the hero of Untouchable (1935). Artistically speaking, the symbolic design of the novel interferes with the reality of the characterization. The core of the novel lies elsewhere in the dramatization of the social conflict. There is endless oscillation between servile acceptance and the spirit of rebellion that shapes the soul.

The emphasis now shifts from Marxian revolution to servile submissiveness. The important thing is the self-realization of the sufferer and the consequent revolts which ultimately and subdued under the pressure of circumstances. The chains of caste are too tough to separate, nevertheless conscious dawns upon the sufferer.

The novel begins with presenting Bhikhu as a defiant, protesting figure but as the story progresses; his defiance continues diminishing until finally he quits the scene and submerges himself in the vast anonymity of a metropolis. Bhikhu otherwise has most of the qualities with which Bakha is endowed. He seeks self-expression through labour and his dedication to work is total and complete.

‘Call me, if you need two strong arms!’ Bhikhu calls out as the power welled up in his arms with the welding of the hammer.50

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He achieves solidarity and self-realization through labour and he has the confidence right from the beginning that the road will be built somehow. Labour becomes for him as a means of liberating himself from his bondage and of overcoming his alienation. Like Bakha he has an enthusiasm for education but unlike Bakha, he can read, sing and write and even compose verses. A worshiper of the poet Kabir, he often mumbles exhortations of the weaver-saint. While Bakha is caught by the spell of Gandhi’s words, Bhikhu enthuses his fellow-men to continue their work with the holy phrase of Jawaharlal’s name. “Take the name of Jawaharlal and carry on.” Bhikhu is the bard, and despite his down to earth realism, he has capacity to get lost in distant visions. For even in the midst of his absorbing work, he sits day-dreaming for a moment:

For a moment, he looked across the sun’s thick haze towards Gurgaon, beyond which was Delhi, the land of the red earth, by the Jumna river.

In the end when he walks in the direction of the road, it is the distant vision of a new world that beckons him. Thus there blend in the character of Bhikhu, the qualities of one who loves work more than anything else, of a visionary, and admirer of, the ideal of Nehru, a bard, a devotee of Kabir one loves his fellow-men and above all one who has the qualities of accepting the fact of caste system.

These are sufficient equipments for an untouchable youth of the fifties and sixties to sensitively react to the hostile forces in his environment but Bhikhu seldom grows equal to his challenge. Given the ferment of an awakening all around him, he should have become instrumental in making a new destiny for his class. But instead,
he remains as passive as Bakha. In fact Bakha in *Untouchable (1935)* develops through his interaction with situations but Bhikhu does not show any development as he remains more or less a static character. For in the beginning of the novel, he seems firm and defiant when he puts up a bold fight with Thakur Singh’s son. It happens when Bhikhu’s mother Laxmi, is prevented from entering into the temple by caste Hindu; his revolutionary feelings were exacerbate to a great extent:

‘Why should we suffer this humiliation now’ Bhikhu felt, if he had never suffered it before….. And why should his mother suffer because he had quarried the stone for the road. Now he was determined to build the road whether they should help or not.^^

Bhikhu is no doubt poor but he is a man of courage and firm determination which is evident from the above quoted lines but he seems reluctant to allow his character to cross a certain border line. Bhikhu’s initial protest and defiance is killed by his mother with a view to blocking his anger from taking a form of firm revolt against the social set up. Though he tells his mother that one is a leather worker by profession and not by birth, she tries to persuade him to follow her even in the face of insult by superior caste people:

‘Love them even if they hate you!’ the mother answered proceeding ahead. ‘Love them as Lord Krishna love the whole world….. Love the old and the young….. Love the cattle as Shyam, God of Brinda Ban, love the cows. Love everyone everything….. then through good deeds shall we rise into higher caste ….. ‘Bhikhu, son,’ she said turning round with mellow watery eyes, ‘I want to take the anger out of your heart. Love all God’s children and you will get love back…. If not now, in the next life…. Look how Lambardar Dhooli Singh favours you! ….. And, he is of the same caste as the landlord. Look at me! Have I not suffered all my life? ….. First your drunken father ….. then widowhood. And is my love growing less? ….. God’s love is my heart….. ^\textsuperscript{54}'}
Laxmi’s efforts to persuade her son fails as it does not convince Bhikhu but her sentiments reinforce our belief that in the core of their heart, they have accepted themselves as outcastes and that they have to bow down to whatever the insult and humiliation they are subjected to and which they must endure.

Bhikhu again plays this unconvincing role during the time of the great man—made disaster. He appears helpless and resigned to his fate. Even the burning of the untouchables’ huts, including his own by Sajnu and Lachman, does not rouse him to take revenge. Unlike any rebel character, he does not show any sort of resolve and determination to retaliate against the person responsible for perpetrating the crime rather he “stood grim and tacit rum, but turned his face away from the tender scene with dimmed eyes and contemplated the smoke above the flames.” It is incredible that an untouchable of the sixties would react so feebly even to such a gruesome horror as the mass destruction of their huts.

All his desires are kept subdued and unfulfilled within him. Fascinated by Thakur Singh’s daughter Rukmani, he knows what he will have to suffer if the half-conscious affection of his love for her were to be expressed. All his desires and excitement are off no avail. He merely feigns courage, aware of his loneliness and the very earth which he loved as a child. It is only an undefined attraction between Rukmani and Bhikhu:

For he realized that mother earth could not feed him even Sajnu and Mahesh and Ram Niwas were going to carry on their vendetta about wages and swoop down upon him from behind the hedges.
The last but not the least incident which shows Bhikhu's passivity and submissiveness is when Sajnu kicked the brass tumbler from his hand for defiling it. Bhikhu, in the true Gandhian fashion does not even react over the insult rather he stands helpless and repentant, unable to retaliate. He said:

As you have never worked in your life, you don’t know what it is to be thirsty! He said. And he felt he could hit him but instantly, he remembered that he was a chamar untouchable and controlled himself.57

Then again, Bhikhu's decision to go on what appears like a pilgrimage to Delhi at the end, tantamount to a total resignation on his part to this reality and an implicit acceptance of the state of things as they are. Bhikhu's portrayal in this novel is certainly not as artistically successful as it was with Bakha, the protagonist of Untouchable (1935) where Anand has established himself as a successful artist and novelist. Saros Cowasjee has justified it thus:

Bhikhu, the representative of the untouchables, remains shadowy, and Anand's endeavour to show in him some of the qualities of Bakha reveals only his insipidity by comparison.58

In Untouchable (1935), the protagonist stands in the centre of the novel whereas in The Road (1963), as M. K. Naik points out, Bhikhu stands as "a pale and unrealized figure." He certainly emerges as more "shadowy avatar of Bakha."59 The novelist has no fresh insights into the outcaste's psychology to offer while painting a second picture of the untouchable. The Road (1963) has neither the unity of Untouchable, nor the diversification. G. S. Balarama Gupta is of the view that a significant difference between the two protagonists existed in the achievement of their aim:

It is easy to comprehend this point when see that Bhikhu has traveled much further than that Bakha
along the road of struggle. Whereas Bakha has gained an awareness of his miserable social position and only a vague idea of some possible way out, Bhikhu, in addition to all these, is already treading towards his goal. In fact, he achieves it in a sense: the road is built at last. In this, perhaps, lies the significance of Road.60

These critics, while coming to the different conclusions, however, do not see that the incompatibility between the hero's passivity and the dynamic of social reality is an offshoot of the caste heredity which choked the personality of an individual with its deathly conventions and dead environment.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


5 ibid., p. 45

6 ibid., p. 49

7 ibid., p. 52.


10 ibid., p. 55.

11 ibid., p. 49.


14 Ibid., p. 56.

15 ibid., p. 57

16 ibid., p. 73.


19 ibid., p. 83.


24 ibid., p. 57.


26 ibid., p. 37.


28 ibid., p. 122.

29 ibid., p. 44.

30 ibid., p. 175.


39 ibid., p. 204.
44 ibid., p. 208.
51 Ibid., p. 92.
52 ibid, p. 92.
53 Ibid., p. 5.
54 ibid., pp. 4-5.
55 ibid, p. 45.

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