

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.5.66>

Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*

Sujoy Barman

Independent Researcher
Qualified-NET (UGC) &
SET (WBCSC) West
Bengal, India

Abstract

M. R. Anand is a socio-marxist Indian fiction writer and his fictions deal with the core pictures of the Indian society of the last phase of the British colonialism in India. *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are his masterpieces and they are known for the delineation of the cruelty of caste system in the Hindu society, and with the economical suppression of 1930s and 1940s. This entitled paper, based on Bakha, the hero of the *Untouchable*, is an attempt to the trends of modernism in Indian society and identifies Bakha and his generation as the first modern generation in India. It shows how Bakha becomes modern or identifies the situations that force Bakha to be a modern man.

Keywords- *Modernism, Mimicry, Colonialism, Rationalism, Tradition*

M. R. Anand and his works are known for realism, the pictures of true Indian society. The novel *Untouchable* is not an exception, it is the criticism and the attack of the caste system of the Hindu culture in India. The Hindu culture is divided into several castes like Brahmin, Sudra; the high caste and low caste. Between these castes, the system of touchable and untouchable is very strictly maintained and they stand in the two opposite poles of the society. The touchable and untouchable mark the binary structure of the society. The term 'untouchable' refers to a class of people who stands against the touchable group of people, they are bound in a system where the value of life, like liberty and dignity is nothing. Untouchables are restricted, they have nothing of power, they are puppets, they are subaltern creatures, and to be considered as the black side of the society. The novel sets at the time of colonial period of India and the people of untouchable class have double consciousnesses, first they are inferiors to the higher touchable people and they are under the rule of foreign

Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*

By
Sujoy Barman

power of the British. So there is nothing good in their lives because they are dominated with two powers, one is foreign and another is indigenous or local.

The term modernism is a movement of revolutionary ideas, philosophy, logic etc that challenges the traditional ideas, reforms them, reconstructs and modifies them, and in some cases demolishes the traditional believes and cults. The movement, at first started in Europe, and then it has extended over the other none- European countries. The modernism appeared in the fields of science, technology, philosophy, religion, traditional cultural believes. It is a long and lengthy movement that has ran through centuries. In the medieval period, the modernism appeared in the European countries and the most interesting fact is that at the present time there are many places in the world, specially the African countries, the mark of modernism is still obscure. In the colonized countries, the modernism begins with the European policies of colonialism and imperialism. India was colonized by the British rule, and generally the modernism, in India appeared with the hand of Britain and its colonization. It has already been said that the M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*, historically deals with the last phase of the British rule in India, and generally in the characters of the novel, the trends or cults of modernism appear. Bakha is the representative of that generation and he is the hero of the first modernism in India.

For the colonized countries, the modernism begins, in most of the cases with the policies of colonialism and imperialism. And for India, there is nothing exceptional. But it spreads two or more ways. Edward Said divided the world into occident and orient. Occident is referred to the Western European countries and orient is to the Eastern countries. The European occidental countries regard the none-European countries as odd, uncultured, practitioners of supernatural power, uncivilized. In order to civilize or educate them, the Europeans take it as their moral duty to civilize or modernize the non-Europeans. This is known as the ' White Man's Burden'. At the same time, it is the Eurocentrism that is the philosophy of Europe and the Europeans consider themselves at the centre of the world and everyone should follow or move around them, and they force other to do so. And to copy Europe for the indigenous people means to follow modernism. These are the conceptual systems, imposed by the colonial countries, by which modernism appears in the colonized countries. But there is also a colonized way of modernism. This way is known as mimicry in the field of postcolonial study. It is found that human learns and teaches himself through imitation or copying others and it is inborn quality of human that distinguishes himself from other animals. In colonized countries, it is noticed that the indigenous people imitate or copy the outer culture, and thus they educate themselves with the modern European culture. Through these systems, the modernism is found in a colonized country. Bakha is a native Indian boy, and he belongs to the British colonial period in India. He comes from the Indian native culture with some corrupted supernatural practices, and at the same time, he adopts the

**Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's
*Untouchable***

**By
Sujoy Barman**

modernism. In his character, the modernism appears and he challenges some norms of Indian society, reforms or reconstructs them.

M. R. Anand, in the novel *Untouchable* introduces the family of Lakha. It is an Indian native family with poverty, patriarchy, good relation between siblings etc. The members of the family are illiterate, but while Anand describes the family and its customs, he introduces the mark of modernism. Lakha and his family practice the western life style, "No tea, no piece of bread, and I am dying of hunger! Put the tea on and call those sons of a pig, Bakha and Rakha, to me!" (*Untouchable*, 23)

Here in the family, the tea symbolizes the western life system. Even the elder son of the family, Bakha has the infatuation for the western culture, he has the egoism for it, and he is addressed as a 'pilpali sahib' by his friends. Through the imitation of the British life here Bakha modernizes himself-

He had been told they were sahibs, superior people. He had felt that to put on their clothes made one a sahib too. So he tried to copy them in everything, to copy them as well as he could in the exigencies of his peculiarly Indian circumstances. (*Untouchable*, 03)

In such cases, through the imitation or mimicry, the natives adopt the western modern culture. But there are so many reasons behind this truth of modernism. It has already been told that mimicry is an inborn quality of human to educate himself and while a native finds the new colonial culture of life, he is infatuated towards it, and starts to copy it. And at the time of imitation, he finds pleasure because he comes to know a new culture and educates himself with that imitated culture. Besides this, the second most important reason behind the imitation of a native in the colonized country is escapism. It is true that the colonial culture is superior to the colonized culture in the colonized country, and the indigenous people have to face humiliation, the brutality of discrimination of social ranks. And through the imitation, a native classifies himself to the superior class and thus escapes from humiliation. In the case of Bakha, behind his modernization, these two things are happening. He belongs to the untouchable class of people, faces the humiliation of caste system by the touchable class of people. Being an untouchable, he has no dignity of life; being a sweeper, he has no reputation as a man. He knows the harsh reality of life. This is the one kind domination, but at the same time he is also a subject to the British rule. He is dominated by two powers, one is Indian i.e. the touchable – untouchable system, the powers distinction between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins; and the second is the British colonial power. Thus Bakha becomes a subaltern creature in his own country. Bakha knows it well that he will never be accepted to the Brahmin society as a high class man, but adopting the culture of England, he can change the situation of his life. He can escape from the brutal system. That is why Bakha adopts the culture of England and educates himself with the modern English culture.

Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*

**By
Sujoy Barman**

For a modern man, education must be needed and without education the imagination of modern man is incomplete. Because an educated man can observe anything with the rationality to employ properly. Education increases the power of rationality and enables one to challenge the corrupted systems of the society, gives psychological power to reform the tradition. So education must for a modern man. In the novel *Untouchable*, the hero Bakha has an infatuation for education. He belongs to the subaltern class of people, and education is a dream for him. There is no any educational system for these subaltern untouchable class of people. But for the western education and curriculum, Bakha has a deep fantasy. He hires a teacher for his education. During that time, only babu's sons are allowed to go school, and for the sons of sweepers, it is beyond the capacity. But Bakha, being a sweeper boy, doesn't accept this educational system. He starts his education with babu's son whom he employs as his master, "You will also teach me , won't you, little brother? I will give you a pice a day." (*Untouchable*, 32)

Sahib for Bakha is the model for modern man and Bakha himself wants to be a sahib, or modern man. Only school can make Bakha a sahib, and at first Bakha needs to educate himself, but for the boys from sweepers education is not allowed-

His uncle at the British barracks had told him when he first expressed the wish to be a sahib that he would have to go to school if he wanted to be one. And he had wept and cried to be allowed to go to school. But then his father had told him that schools were meant for the babu's, not for the lowly sweepers. (*Untouchable*, 30)

With all these preventions, Bakha manages education in order to be a sahib, a modern man and at the same time it also increases the rationality in his thinking.

A modern man is rational, he thinks rationally and logically and without rationality a modern man is incomplete. A rational man debates logically before taking anything and thus he tries to achieve perfection. In *Untouchable*, Bakha is a rational sweeper boy. He is lacking of education and his attempt of educating himself with western curriculum is not so effective, yet the rationality is available in his psychology. He questions the religious practices and social systems. There are some religious rituals which are out of his understanding and in order to understand them he thinks over them very carefully. One of these is his rationality over the relation between cows and the Hindu people. Among the Hindu people, the cow is regarded as the divine figure of mother, and in the mythology the cow is worshipped. But in practical, a cow in a Hindu family is on starvation. And this is an odd or queer to Bakha-

How queer, the Hindus don't feed their cows although they call the cow "mother"! Bakha thought. "Their cattle which go to graze at the brook side are so skinny and feeble. (*Untouchable*, 45)

Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*

**By
Sujoy Barman**

Bakha and his rationality is also available on the social issues. He belongs to the Hindu culture and society where discrimination exists among the people regarding their family backgrounds, and he also belongs to the Indian society where Hindus, Muslims and Christians live equally; they have no any discrimination. A man from touchable class meets with a muslim or a christian and that time he never spoils his religion, but when he comes into a touch of an untouchable, he thinks his religion is spoiled. At the same time, a muslim or a christian never thinks so when he comes into a touch of an untouchable. Bakha can't understand this social discrimination that is employed under the name of religion. The market incident provides Bakha this rude experience of life and he asks himself to find the answer.

I was tried of working on the latrines everyday. That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes. The tonga- wallah was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the sahibs. (*Untouchable*, 43)

To copy the British modern culture, or to educate himself with the British curriculum and rationality are the forces that help Bakha to be a modern. All these elements are found inside of Bakha. But revolutions against the colonial power in order to gain liberty and freedom bring the rational thinking among the indigenous people. Such national revolutions are the outer forces to instigate a native to be a rational man whereas the imitation is an inborn. In the novel *Untouchable*, M. R. Anand introduces such outer forces which play a vital role and deeply influence the rationality of Bakha. Bakha listens the lectures of Gandhiji over touchable and untouchable. Through the lectures, Bakha comes to know that Gandhi himself belongs to touchable class, and while he touches an untouchable, his religion has not been spoiled. Gandhi's lectures show Bakha the future India where the value of all Indians will be equal, they will be equally treated. So hearing the lectures of Gandhi, there is found a change in the psychology of Bakha, and it pushes Bakha towards modernism-

Bakha felt thrilled to the very marrow of his bones. That the Mahatma should want to be born as an outcaste! That he should love scavenging! He loved the man. He felt he could put his life in his hands and ask him to do what he liked with it. (*Untouchable*, 138)

M. R. Anand also hints the modernism in novel. Bakha and his play mates are the first generation of modern India whereas their parents are the last generation of old India. The 'Hockey Match' is the symbol of beginning of the modern India. In the game, boys from every class play together. This game destroys the old touchable- untouchable psychology among the boys who play together without fearing the lost of religion. The match has been played between the 38th Dogra boys from untouchable class and the 31st Punjabi who are the sons of babus, the touchable class. And all these boys are above from the caste system and they are the futures of modern India.

Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*

**By
Sujoy Barman**

A modern man is rational that has already told, and Bakha is a rational modern man. It is right that a rational man challenges the odd customs of the tradition, reconstructs them, modifies them. But at the same time he defends his own tradition. Both these are happened with Bakha. He rationally attacks the religious practices, class and society, but at the same time he defends the Hindu mythology. He rationally and logically defends the Hindu gods and also attacks the Christianity. Colonel Hutchinson is the missionary who attempts Bakha to transfer to the Christianity. He alludes Bakha by the name *Yessuh Messih* (Jesus Christ). But Bakha very innocently and logically defends Colonel Hutchinson and keeps his faith for his own religion. Thus Bakha is not a champion of modern culture of India but he is also the champion of traditional culture at the rising of modernism in a colonized country like India.

He died that we might be forgotten,' thought Bakha. 'What does that mean? He is the son of God! How could anybody be the son of God if God, as my mother told me, lives in the sky? How could He have a son? And why did His son die that we should be forgiven? Forgiven for what? And who is this son of God? (*Untouchable*, 117/118)

Now it becomes clear that for a colonized country, modernism begins with the hand of colonialism. In a native country, the colonial period is the time when the natives reform and reconstruct their own tradition and at the same time they start to adopt the colonial modern culture. And during that time, there are two kinds of natives; first one follows the old tradition and the second one accepts the new tradition. *Untouchable* by M. R. Anand belongs to the last phase of the British colonialism in India and; in the novel, the Indian old tradition with its supernatural practices and new philosophy of modernism exist together. Bakha is the hero of the story and he moves towards the gleams of modernism. He is the representative of the first generation of modern man in India. Through the close study of his character, one comes to know how a native becomes modern.

Work Cited

Anand. M. R. *Untouchable*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2001.

Bakha, the Representative of the First Modern Generation of India: A Study of M. R. Anand's *Untouchable*

**By
Sujoy Barman**