

From Despair to Awakening: Maslow's Theory of Motivation in Untouchable

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With the world moving into an era of Artificial Intelligence and robotics, human lives are fleeting through significant changes every minute. Even amidst such path breaking advancements, a part of human populace continue to perish owing to technological poverty. This is the point where the novel *Untouchable* continues to astonish posterity owing to its relevance in the modern India. The social evils presented by the author remain prevalent across the country making the work all the more contemporary. Appropriately named “a social document” by writer T.M.J Indra Mohan, the discrimination and stigmatization that the central character faces as an individual ought to be analyzed in different realms. American psychologist Abraham Maslow propounds a set of universal needs that is common to every individual in the society. More popularly known as the theory of motivation, Maslow divided his hierarchy of needs into five levels of a pyramid in his 1943 paper “A Theory of Human Motivation”. The needs are categorized into physiological needs, safety and security, belongingness and love, self-esteem and self-actualization needs. According to his theory, needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied to achieve the higher ones. Taking these factors into consideration, Bakha’s life as a manual scavenger can be analyzed.

Physiological needs

Physiological needs are the basic needs of any individual. Unfortunately, many Indians are deprived of these primary necessities such as food and water. But Bakha is denied all these generally on the grounds of caste and particularly due to his sub caste. Bakha’s early morning interior monologue gets broken when his dad urges him to attend the latrines. The relentless abuse of his father forces him to wake up from his depressive nap as he envies his sleeping siblings. He leaves for his work with an empty stomach and tends to the latrines with no grievances.

Despite doing the menial and filthy job he is supposed to plead or rather beg for his daily bread. He shouts, “Bread for the sweeper, mother. Bread for the sweeper” (59). The same upper caste woman who insults him of his religion, urges her son to excrete downstairs so that the manual scavenger will clean it. The obstinate and arrogant woman orders: “Come here, come downstairs, quick, and go here in the drain. The sweeper will clear it away” (64). Despite doing his work, the woman flings the bread at him out of the hunger and humiliation. “He was too disgusted to clean the drain after this, especially as the little boy sat relieving himself before him” (65). Regardless of his hunger, the young man becomes more bothered about not meeting the demands of his father, denying himself even a morsel of food. As his sister urges him to have food, he becomes even more disturbed at the thought of being a sweeper. He shrinks away from basket as his hands come in contact with a piece of wet bread. As he realises that he is about to relish on the food waste of an upper caste Hindu, it creates a nauseating feeling in him. As jalebis and breads are thrown at him, the stigma of being a sweeper encases him even more.

The struggle for survival is not limited to the availability of food alone. Bakha, after his early work at latrines gets back home to realise that there is not even a single drop of water to quench his thirst. Soon Sohini, Bakha's sister, leaves home with the anticipation of fetching water for her brother. Amidst the practice of untouchability, Sohini becomes the victim of double discrimination as Gulabo, the washerwoman, abuses her in the name of her superiority in sub caste hierarchy. She is provoked with no reason and verbal abuses are showered upon her. After Gulabo utters, "You bitch of a sweeper woman!" (17) she runs in order to slap her. Dalit writers have often connected the struggle for water with the struggle for life. The scarcity of the water faced by them is narrated by the writer as he describes Bakha's hut. Even though they needed more than a pitcherful of water, they never got it "till sanitation, cleanliness and hygiene had lost its meaning for them" (67).

Safety needs

The second level of needs focus on security and protection that is secondary to food and water. It also includes a well-organised environment free from chaos. Its components include employment, financial security and health. These requirements are regarded to be highly significant especially in a family set up. The introduction of the novel exposes the bleak and filthy environment which is home to outcastes. Violations of basic requirements such as health and sanitation are very well depicted as Anand writes:

The outcaste 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...A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks... And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an 'uncongenial' place to live in. (1)

Quite contrary to the outcaste colony is the market. It is this difference that succumbs Bakha to loath his work at latrines. Out of his desperation, he agrees that he will better go to the town where he will be supposed to clean more of animal waste and less human waste. When he reaches the market, he is lost in "a sea of colour" (35). It occurs to him that it has almost been a month since he has come to the city. Bakha becomes engulfed in the various nuances of the market, smelling its odour, focusing "multi-coloured, jostling crowd" (35) and their activities. As far as work is concerned, these sweepers are left with no job other than manual scavenging. They are supposed to follow their family profession no matter how much intelligent they are. Even though Bakha abhorred his job, it was "a sort of intoxication" (10) for him that maintained his physical health. He was officially in charge of three rows of latrines and looked way superior to the job he handled due to the steadiness, flow and attire with which he worked.

Lakha, Bakha's father, recollects a heart wrenching memory when his son was suffering from fever and was at the verge of death. He evokes how he went and begged in front of the dispensary of Hakim Bhagawan Das, a high caste Hindu doctor. Even though he is aware that no one will pay heed to a sweeper, he continuous pleading to every passer-by. As he stood imploring near the heap of waste he had collected, the neglect faced by every sweeper is brought into picture. Lakha ponders how much hard-earned money he had; he could never make them useful enough to buy medicine for his child. Unable to withstand the sorrow,

Lakha enters directly into the dispensary unbothered of the consequences the act would have. All of a sudden people bellow “Bhangi!” (sweeper) and a furious Doctor shouts at him addressing him as “chandaal” (73). This is the harsh reality of Indian society; caste matters more than health and education.

Belongingness and love

Though Bakha loved his family, he loathed his living conditions. He considered his colony as an ‘uncongenial’ place to live. His detest for the filthy living conditions along with the exposure to the English way of learning formed his admiration for “white Tommies” (2). He was never attached to his menial environment and often dreamt of a better life.

Parents

Bakha’s family consisted of his father, younger brother and sister. But the first person that Bakha fondly remembers is his deceased mother. While Lakha is a bullying father, his mother was a loving one. He often missed the sweet and hot liquid that his mother gave him every day early morning. Unlike his father, mother for him was “kindness personified” (6). Lakha, Bakha’s father and the *Jemadar* or the Head of all the sweepers, is a master in bullying his children. Lakha is introduced as an abusive father when he awakes Bakha by saying, “Get up, ohe you Bakhya, you son of a pig,...Get up and attend to the latrines or the sepoy will be angry” (5).

Despite the harassment from his father, Bakha remains a dutiful son when he offers to rub his back with oil. Though a bully, Lakha was a kind-hearted man who often failed to express his love for the children. His intimidating nature was only a mask to maintain the authority that he was already losing. But the loving father in him surfaces as he narrates his struggle to get medicines for Bakha in his childhood. Lakha narrates how his heart ached when he saw his son at the verge of death and begs to Hakim Ji, “The meaning of my life is my child” (72). The love that Lakha hides in his heart surfaces only at rare occasions such as these. But what irritated and infuriated Bakha about his father was his docile subjugation to the upper caste Hindus. When the boy finds it disgusting to have the left-over food of Upper caste Hindus, he retracts from sharing it with his father knowing and accepting how unbothered his father would be. Thus, while his mother was embodiment of love, his father was an epitome of love hidden behind a heap of abuses.

Siblings

Out of his siblings, Rakha and Sohini, even though Sohini is submissive, the physically weak Rakha seems to be a younger version of their dad. Even then, when Bakha orders him to attend the latrines beckoning to the ill health of their father, Rakha obeys him. He often exploited their father’s affection to attack Bakha. Sohini, the only sister of Bakha and Rakha, is more or less like a second mother to them. Since their mother’s death, she has been burdened with household chores. She tended to her brothers’ needs like a mother. Even without Bakha uttering a single word about his thirst and fatigue, she realises it and rushes to fetch water for him. The writer compares her womanly instincts with the motherly instinct. The love Bakha has for his sister is vocalized sternly when Pundit attempts to molest her. It is the first instance where the writer exposes the hypocrisy of the upper caste men as well as the aggressive face of Bakha. He is very well aware of his sister’s beauty and is rather possessive of her. After the attack on her honour, he bemoans:

I could have sacrificed myself for Sohini. Everyone will know about her. My poor sister! How can she show her face to the world after this? But why didn't she let me go and kill that man? Why was she born a girl in our house to bring disgrace upon us? So beautiful! So beautiful! and so accursed! I wish she had been the ugliest woman in the world! Then no one would have teased her! (56-57)

Friends and Ram Charan's sister

Ram Charan, the washerwoman's son and Chota, the leather worker's son were the closest allies of Bakha. They are the ones who nickname him imitation sahib. Be it happiness or sorrow the time spent with them was an interim relief for him. Disturbed after his humiliations, he meets his friends. Ram Charan saving sweets for the other two and Chota imitating his best friends are all small but beautiful things that they share among them. After the troubling experiences of the day, when they sat sharing sweets, Bakha behaves strangely. At this point, the writer remarks the depth of their friendship. Though Ram Charan was superior among them followed by Chota in caste hierarchy, the trio never practised it among them. They ate and played together, often making fun of each other's caste. As Bakha sat silently, they realise it and interrogates him only to realise how he and Sohini were humiliated by the upper caste Hindus. Both get enraged at the narrative and Chota promises to take revenge on the priest who abused Sohini. On one hand his friends gave him an indefinite strength, while on the other his heart remained bare in front of them.

The fourteen-year-old washerwoman's daughter is the only character whom Bakha loves sensuously. Bakha inculcates attraction and affection for her naturally from their childhood days. Ironically, on the day of her marriage, he recalls the good olden days when they played marriage. He had always felt proud of acting the role of her husband, even though those were the matters of past. Many years later even when they grew up, Bakha's admiration for her remained the same. Her soft and luminous eyes along with the "sylph-like form" (78) has always been close to his heart. Though he experiences sensual feelings at the imagination of her naked body and squeezing her within his arms, these feelings were subdued at the vicinity of her. Moreover, his shy and restrained nature prevents him even from facing her.

Esteem needs

Esteem needs are highly psychological in nature. It comprises the respect given by others along with self-respect. Bakha's day begins with the verbal abuse of his assertive and bullying father. To add on, Havildar Charat Singh, the famous hockey player of 38th Dogras regiment is the first upper caste Hindu who showers abusive words upon him in that morning, "Why aren't the latrines clean, you rogue of Bakhe! There is no one fit to go near! I have walked all round!" (7). Though Bakha abhors his father's submissiveness, he is unaware of his own passive acceptance of social stigma. When Charat Singh offers him hockey bat, writer observes a kind of servility occupying Bakha similar to the helplessness and weakness of "a bottom dog" (9) suddenly receiving a bait. As he is caught in a medley of thoughts, another upper caste Hindu blames him of being lackadaisical which he accepts calling "Maharaj" (11). The young boy is further condemned into sub-human status when he joins his hands and begs cigarette. When Bakha reflects and reaffirms that smoking for a sweeper was an offence in front of Lord, his contentment of receiving a cigarette is compared to a

dog's satisfaction on receiving a bone. Moreover, when a Muslim permits him to light the cigarette, not used to taking such liberties, he is rather shocked and taken aback.

The novel, which depicts a single day in the life of the protagonist, is a set of humiliating experiences that haunts him. Even before these adversities befall him, Anand sets up the stage by exhorting the life conditions and Bakha's way of life. But Anand's hero is logical enough to interrogate and delve into the injustice by pondering over the double standards of upper caste Hindus, who does not care about pollution when it comes to sexual harassment. After every humiliation, Bakha succumbs to his inferiority but questions his own apathy. Even when he is slapped by upper caste Hindu at market or even when food is thrown at him, he passively accepts his misfortune only to regret later. After picking up the bread he contemplates, "I shouldn't have picked up that food from the pavement" (65). Such humility turns into astonishment when Havildar Charat Singh, as per his promise, gives him a hockey bat and that too, a new one. To his further surprise, Charat Singh shares his tea with him catalysing the meekness of downtrodden in him.

But Bakha does not go on accepting his fate throughout the novel. His meek acceptance of the humiliating situations gradually evokes his aggression. The writer has not dramatized aggression in a strict sense but has rather rendered it systematically in accordance with the changes of external environment and its influence on the protagonist. This aggressive phase is the point where Bakha's esteem comes into picture. His anger bursts out when his sister confesses how the priest teased and fondled her breasts. The writer notes, "The son of a pig! Bakha exclaimed. 'I will go and kill him!'" (55). As he narrates his disgusting experiences to his friends, his meekness takes the form of self-pity. The strength and belief of his friendship catalyses his anger further. Bakha's self reflection is more or less like an interior monologue: The cruel crowd, all of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused? The Sanitary Inspector that abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate too. That's why I came here. I was tired of working in latrines every day. That is why they don't touch us, the high castes. (70)

Education

An individual's confidence is directly and indirectly connected to the education he/she receives. Bakha's urge to get an education first surfaces when he witnesses the sons of Burra babu heading for school. His father discourages Bakha's yearning to get educated by declaring that schools were not for sweepers but for children of upper castes. Even though he laments upon his father's words, with age he realises that even if his father allows him, the upper caste parents would not allow him to study due to the fear of their children being 'contaminated' by touch. Though absurd this system was for Bakha, he was helpless as even the educated upper caste masters would not recruit him as their student lest they get 'polluted'. Thus, though Bakha found no way of acquiring education, nothing could reduce the desire within him. He thinks:

The anxiety of going to school! How beautiful it felt! How nice it must be to be able to read and write! One could read papers after having been to school. One could talk to the sahibs. One wouldn't have to run to the scribe every time a letter came. And one wouldn't have to pay him to have one's letters written. He had often felt like reading Waris Shah's *Hir and Ranjha*. (30)

Out of his curiosity and desire he urges one of the children of upper caste babu to teach him in return of an anna per lesson. Amidst all these Bakha finds the entire system ridiculous because ironically speaking, most of the upper caste children touched him while playing hockey and wouldn't mind him having at school. But the "old Hindus were cruel" (31).

Moving on to other characters, alike Bakha, Rakha, his younger brother is also forced to clean the latrines while their sister Sohini, is directed to clean temple courtyard. When the other upper caste children enjoy luxuries of life, girl children are either abused like Sohini or married off like Ram Charan sister at the age of fourteen. Child abuse and child marriages have remained as a curse on Indian society.

This denial of education is hauntingly picturised by the Hindi Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki in his short story, "Joothan". It narrates the story of a young boy who attends school overcoming all the hurdles of caste only to be humiliated and discriminated by his masters. Being autobiographical in nature, it recounts how the writer was shamed by the headmaster and compelled him to sweep the school just because he was from the community of sweepers. Even in the story as the protagonist's father laments for his son's education, he recollects how the government has opened schools for everyone and yet how their children are discriminated. What makes "Joothan" different from *Untouchable* is the autobiographical elements the short story has. Both these are the tragic tales of a whole community destined by birth to lead an unenviable life marked by poverty and isolation midst of prosperity. Similar to Bakha who calls the upper caste Hindus cruel, Omprakash Valmiki has also remarked that his intention in writing the work was to remind his readers that the Indian society has been and still is cruel, inhumane and insensitive towards Dalits and especially to sweeper community.

Self-actualisation

Self-actualisation is the thirst of an individual to surpass all obstacles and achieve ambition. It is realising one's full potential and the desire to excel in life. According to Maslow, one can pursue this level only when all the other needs are satisfied.

Modern Bakha

In case of Bakha, the colonization process has made him Western euphoric due to which he begins to doubt and even reject the native way of life. His attraction to the western way of life began during his work in the British regiment where he was treated as a human being by the "Tommies" (2). He believes that wearing the costumes of a white man would make him sahib too. Therefore, he effortlessly went imitating their dressing style which he thought was "fashun" (2). With the pair of trousers along with boots and puttees, he looked more like an "imitation sahib or Pipali sahib" (4) as entitled by his friends. Interestingly, one of Anand's autobiography, published in 1985 is also named *Pipali Sahib*. His appreciation for the whites was so strong that to maintain "fashun", he neither used a proper Indian quilt nor could summon sorrow of his mother's death as she was too old-fashioned for the world, he lived in. Amidst his work, he gets lost in the shameful morning acts of natives. As he witnesses the Indian way of performing ablutions, his detestation for natives is well wrought in his admiration for the whites. While he loathed the gargling and spitting of Indians, he justified the "disgraceful" (10) way of Tommies running naked to take bath. Keeping the dressing style and cleanliness aside, he was even fond of their customs. When his father sips the tea after blowing it, he remembers how his uncle had informed him that the *goras* did not enjoy

the full taste of the tea because they didn't blow it. But as far as Bakha was concerned, these habits of his father and his uncle were "natuor native habits" (24). Therefore, even though his tongue burnt while sipping the tea, he drank it without blowing it so as to become a sahib.

Religion and spirituality

Though Maslow was an atheist and had complex religious views, he acknowledged the importance of a transcendental experience. Taking the novel into consideration, religion is the supreme institution that confers Bakha a sub-human status. While Hinduism and Christianity are discussed in detail, there are only glimpses of Islam in the work.

The caste and sub-caste division practiced in Hinduism forms the crux of the novel. The upper caste lady who flings bread at Bakha, not only humiliates him by doing so but also by treating the *sadhu* differently. In Hinduism, *sadhu* is any holy person who has abandoned the worldly life and survives on begging. Contrastingly, the woman respects the *sadhu* and offers him proper food while humiliates Bakha, who cleaned their shit. The denial of spirituality and longing for it is picturised in the temple episode. Bakha, as per the orders of his father reaches temple to clean the courtyard and is drawn by the sound from the sanctuary. The writer notes how he feared ten armed and ten headed Gods and Goddesses. His naïve mind interrogates the sculptures and the chants in the temple. As he hears "*Ram, Ram, Sri, Sri, Hari Narayan, Sri Krishna,*" (49), he is baffled for he knew who Ram and Krishna were, but Hari Narayan seemed new to him. Out of his curiosity, he advances towards the sanctuary which has always remained a mystery for him. As he notices two priests and many devotees worshipping the idol, he is rather affected by the melody of the chorus. He notices how the crowd devoted themselves and becomes a devotee himself. For the first time in his life he is spiritually moved as he unconsciously joins his hands as if in a trance. What makes religion important is the inextricable connection it has in inducing caste system in Indian society. The divinity attached to caste system has been deeply engrossed by Bakha as well as by other manual scavengers who believe that their present life is due to the *karma* or actions of their previous lives. This is apparent as Bakha negates the idea of religious conversion due to the fear of being born as an animal in his next birth.

But even that small stint of spirituality is taken away from him as the priest shouts at him for polluting the temple. Priest is one of those hypocrites who can be found in any society. The priest along with the crowd attacks him, "Get off the steps, you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, you dog!" (53). This was and is the reality of Hinduism where spirituality is considered to be luxury of the elite upper caste.

Bakha's deep and abiding belief in the religion is also one of the reasons behind his passive acceptance. Even when he is exposed to Gandhi and his ideologies, his naïve mind believes that Gandhi is surely an avatar or incarnation of Gods Vishnu and Krishna. Bakha had heard how a spider wove a web resembling the portrait of a sage in Lord Viceroy's house at Delhi, as a warning to sahibs to leave Hindustan. As per the information, he even believes that Gandhi is supposed to be the Maharaja of the whole Hindustan and the spider was a messenger sent by God Almighty indicating this. As he listens to Mahatma Gandhi, he falls into a trance similar to the one he experienced in the temple. Moreover, Anand has picturised Gandhian episode in a rather devotional way where followers become devotees waiting with flower garlands to adorn their leader.

After his troubling experiences, as Bakha longs for a consolation, to his surprise, Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of Salvation Army, approaches him with no fear of being polluted. He is rather drawn by the approach of a sahib and eagerly listens to him. Hutchinson, with the aim of converting Bakha, introduces him the basics of Christianity. As the padre talks about Jesus Christ, Bakha is baffled. Throughout the exchange Bakha ponders on how someone can be the Son of God, if God had a Son who was his mother and if He was indeed the Son of God why did he die. Though overwhelmed, he becomes uncomfortable and bored due to the continuous rendering of songs which did not answer his questions. Out of the little knowledge he had, Bakha compares two religions. He reasons that though sahib's God "YessuhMessih" (118) has Son, he never knew whether Lord Ram had one. Moreover, he realises that the new God does not differentiate between himself and a Brahmin. But though his innocent mind fails to understand the idea of all human beings being sinners and that of the judgement day, his logical mind states that he did not commit any sins. The idea of religious conversion however terrifies him. He dreads being born as other organisms. Writer has characterised Mary Hutchinson, the dominating wife of Hutchinson to prove how caste system is practiced even in Christianity. Islam as such is brought into picture only when Bakha is slapped by an upper caste Hindu. The writer reflects how even Muslims were considered outcastes and hence sympathised with Bakha.

According to Abraham Maslow, a person attains self-actualisation only when all other needs are satisfied. In Bakha's case every need remains unfulfilled. Thus, Bakha, as the writer notes is indeed "the child of modern India" (2) because many more Bakhas are still struggling for these needs even after decades of gaining independence. In the work *The Scavengers: Exploited Class of City Professionals*, P.S Vivek notes how they accept their circumstances and are ease with it. According to the author, this is rather unfortunate because it hinders people from looking forward for a better future. The cultural and religious boundaries are imposed upon them and they no longer strive for breaking these barriers. This is very much apparent to every other character of the novel other than Bakha. Everyone else other than Bakha is satisfied with their life as if manual scavenger is only a role assigned to them. As the novel begins, after introducing the protagonist, Mulk Raj Anand reflects this mentality of the outcastes. According to the writer, every other outcaste except Bakha, Chota and Ram Charan were content with their lives. The dissatisfaction of the trio is expressed through their anger. The aggression of these young people at the face of caste discrimination denotes their inner desire for a better life.

Lakha, the father of the young son is the best example who depicts the passive acceptance of fate which culminates in subordination and servility to his masters. He justifies his masters by declaring that "They are really kind. We must realise that it is religion which prevents them from touching us" (74). Even when Bakha narrates his shameful experiences to his father, his father in turn chides him for not giving warning of his approach and asks him to be more careful next time. Lakha'smeek acceptance of upper caste superiority is reflected in Bakha initially. The subordination engulfed by these scavengers are evident in the way they address the upper caste people. Everyone including Bakha is supposed to address the upper caste using words that are either synonymous to king or to God. They include words such as Maharaj, *Huzoor*, Great One, Lord etc for men while for women are addressed as mother.

These scavengers are forced to submit their self-respect and dreams for the sake of their survival. All these points culminate in E. M Forster's introduction to the novel:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for a slave may change his master and his duties and even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them...No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul, and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. (Introduction vi)

Hence, since the outcastes seem to be content with their lot, they don't struggle for their betterment or demand their rights and continues living the life of the downtrodden. Such an indifference to their own situation prevents them from fulfilling their needs.

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