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Remnants of Caste in Casting:
Cast Aside Untouchables in India and Hollywood

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MA Thesis
25 April 2016
For centuries, the subject of caste has permeated the domain of everyday life in South Asia. The caste system is a deeply embedded formation of stratification that manifests through Indian social, cultural, and religious practices. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the social and ideological codes surrounding brownness, darkness, and pigmentation in order to explore the hierarchical class system’s (varna vyavastha) brute realities in terms of self and shared identity politics. Those ostracized in India, readily identified by members of other castes as Dalits, or so-called “untouchables,” endure customs and norms that perpetuate inequality simply to avoid polluting or degrading members of higher—or those commonly accepted by other devout Hindus to be ‘purer,’ ‘cleaner,’ and ‘lighter/more fair’—castes (Bowen 8-10). Since the literal translation of the Sanskrit word for caste, varna, is “color,” the visual practice of caste transposes a fixation on epidermal stereotyping that warrants further analysis (Oxford English Dictionary).

The problem of caste colorism pervades lived reality and seeps into media outlets. With the advent of technology in which socially conscious dialogues previously unprecedented can be easily shared around the world, low and high caste individuals in India are more attuned to conversations about race, color, and its social constructions than ever before. The 2011 Census of India shows that 33.4% and 47.9% of households in rural Indian regions own a television and mobile phone, respectively, compared to a meager 18.9% of television ownership ten years prior (while the information for rural mobile phone use in 2001 is “n/a”). Unsurprisingly, the rates in urban areas are much higher (see table 1). This staggering accessibility to televisual outlets provides previously unparalleled windows to the outside world.

Indian television shows like Satyamev Jayate (The Truth Always Wins) (2012), with high TRPs (target rating points) and an estimated 600 million Indian viewers, foreground social issues
such as untouchability and color-consciousness in India (Thacker; *New York Times*). The show, created by Bollywood actor Aamir Khan, is an emotional chat show that presents facts, figures, and personal stories of real people facing social problems. One episode is particularly relevant to my study of colorism and its inherent role in Indian culture. On July 8th, 2012, *Satamev Jayate* aired “Dignity for All,” an episode dedicated to discussing casteism and renouncing its continued presence in India. In addition to its televisual medium, the show has a unique webpage for videos, articles, and a comment section for people of all socioeconomic backgrounds who have access to computers to interconnect and share their experiences about caste (*Satyamev Jayate*). The cyberspatial platform allows for open, engaging conversation about the antagonism directed towards outcastes.

I begin with the example of *Satyamev Jayate* not to foreground the shaping of technological innovation in social problems, but to explore the magnitude of casteism and colorism that resonate to this day not only in direct interpersonal relations, but also in mediated relations within digital mediums like broadcasting, global communication networks, and, for the purposes of my paper, motion picture industries. My conscious decision to temporarily bracket televisual and cyberspatial sectors and to focus on analogs of caste in the film industry stems from discriminatory hiring or *casting* practices based upon light versus dark complexion. A common unspoken hue spectrum used by Indians categorizes other Indians into a continuum of having fair skin (ideal), “wheatish” skin (acceptable), or dark skin (synonymous with ugliness) (Bowen). Rather than focusing on Bollywood films and India’s obsession with fair skin (sometimes called the “Snow White Syndrome”), I argue that the emphasis on phenotypical features does not only manifest in the plight of lower-castes and in Bollywood casting systems based on degree of fairness, but also in Hollywood (Indian Parents Forum). More specifically, I
compare a Hollywood film in which a non-South Asian actor occupies a South Asian role to the caste system presented in a novel. My relocation of caste to casting allows me to ask the questions I hope to answer over the course of this paper: What do forms of novelistic narrative and cinematic narrative say about the scope of casteism and colorism? What is at stake when scholars pursue this gamut of cast(e) aside experience and concern for the future of Dalitism? How can we expose the complex historical situation of caste in its (re)construction of changed but similar circumstances in Hollywood casting?

In a Hollywood phenomenon known as “brownfacing,” non-Indian actors are cast in roles portraying Indians by donning brown makeup, which enacts a disquieting loss of self-hood for Indian actors and viewers. The root of this paper’s analysis, using an argument of structural homology, is to locate caste in casting in order to better examine this loss of agency. After introducing pertinent historical background and contextual information about varna in India that focuses on the relation of caste to color, I identify the specificity of their related repercussions as a symptomatic agent or actant within the casting system in film culture.

The early 1900s were a tumultuous period when Mahatma Gandhi and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar fought for annihilation of the caste system and British imperialism. Despite the British Raj ruling and stifling modes of production in India until 1947, there were efforts from novelists and filmmakers to produce works about caste and Indian nationalism in both India and abroad. My coupling of Mulk Raj Anand’s novel Untouchable (1935) and RKO Pictures’s Hollywood film Gunga Din (1939) visualizes the effects that colorism had on India and the rest of the world. The novel and film, although published and released within four years of one another, emerged from a dissimilar set of circumstances. On one hand, Anand uses a rhetorical dichotomy of private thought and public speech to give voice to silenced members of the lowest
caste and to contrast this interior thought with politicized discourse on anti-untouchability, or the discourse against the system that labels people untouchable. On the other hand, the cast and crew responsible for *Gunga Din*, adapted from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Gunga Din” (1892), displace Indian actors’ voices through a brownfacing staging technique that perpetuates orientalist tropes and stereotyped comic relief for viewers. The problem with depleting South-Asian voices, whether it be the voices of members of lower castes or excluded Indian actors, points to my framework of comparison: an analysis of the role color plays in novelistic form and filmic representation. Because my primary discussion focuses on skin and how brownness was and is being used as an ethnic prop for masked discrimination, I emphasize the alienating similarities between India’s caste system and the film industry’s cast system through colorism.

In English, the words “caste” and “cast” are phonetic doublets. Etymologically, both originate from “chaste,” meaning, “to correct or amend by discipline; to discipline, train; to bring up under restraint” (OED). For example, a Trinity Cambridge Manuscript (a1225) states, “Mid softnesse he castede þe sinfulle.” (Morris; OED). Similarly, John Lydgate’s *Lyfe of…Seint Albon* (1534) says, “Romains…Had in custome…To serue Diana, that was the *cast goddesse*” (Lydgate; OED, emphasis mine). In these two Old English instances, “caste” and “cast” are used in context as derivatives replacing the word “chaste.”

The modern meaning of caste—a hereditary class or “system of rigid social distinctions in a community”—comes from the earlier definition “a people, stock, or breed (of men),” originating from Johannes Boemus’s *The Fardle of Facions contening the aunciente maners, customes and lawes, of the peoples enhabiting the two partes of the earth, called Affricke and Asie* (1555) (OED). The text reads, “The Nabatheens [an Arab people]...Their caste is wittye in winning of substauence” (Boemus 118; OED). On the other hand, the modern rendering of
“casting”—the pre-production process of choosing a person for a specific role in film, television, dance, etc.—first began being used to connote the allotting or appointing of parts in a play to theatrical actors. The first reference is from Joseph Addison’s publication *The Spectator* No. 219 on November 10th, 1711: “If it be an improper one, the fault is not in us, but in him who has cast our several parts and is the great disposer of drama” (Addison; OED). Whether it be from chastity, a breed, or a process of selection, “caste” and “cast” include elements of restraint or uncertain passivity. Granted, there is no clear delineation between the two terms, but the course of this project shows that the subtle remnants of the Indian caste system can be effectively traced through the Hollywood film industry’s use of unrepresentative, ethnic props.

**Brownfacing as a Loss of Face**

Drawing on the unrepresentative function of brownface casting in Hollywood, Maria Boletsi’s *Barbarism Revisited: New Perspectives on Old Concepts* (2015) proposes a dichotomous model of civilized/barbarian similar to that of my unpacking of the layers between white/western and colored/colonized interactions. Boletsi writes, “While it is still taboo for black and brown actors to impersonate white characters, white actors are allowed to play other ethnic roles” (Boletsi 305). They condense the cultural practices of the intended ethnic group by using cultural and/or racial props. Whether it be by speaking with a different vocal accent, donning traditional garments, or darkening one’s skin, impersonation (or “passing”) depletes individualization. As a result, the difficulties experienced by underrepresented actors to attain roles and the tendency to cast non-minority actors in minority roles persists (Cortés 369-72).

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1 Cf. Prem Chowdhry’s *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema* (2000), pp. 9-17 for discussion on situating audiences (white/western and colored/colonized) in colonial India.

2 In addition to staging props, (contemporary) Hollywood and television industries depict South Asian actors with roles of unrepresentative employment. Indians being cast in roles are typically ones that are marginalized on the professional spectrum, with one end being convenient store workers and cab drivers and the opposing side engineers, scientists, and doctors. Take American character actor Parvesh Cheena.
Brownfacing, or the use of makeup or face-paint to transform white actors into characters of typically darker-skinned ethnicities, is a staging technique that mirrors the theatrical form of blackface minstrelsy in that the transition from “white” to “brown” embodies an excessive, exaggerated form of caricaturing.

Satirizing for dramatic effect and comic relief, brownfacing perpetuates a ‘loss of face’ where false stereotypes of South Asians are portrayed by non-South Asian actors. The racial prop of light to dark engages in dialogues of distorted hyperbolizing, depicting unrepresentative characters through unrepresentative actors.

From Fisher Stevens in Short Circuit 2 (1988), to Jake Gyllenhall in Prince of Persia (2010), to Ashton Kutcher’s PopChips commercial (2012), brownfacing occasionally makes an appearance in contemporary Hollywood film and television/advertising industries. The first instance of South Asian brownfacing is Sam Jaffe’s performance in the role of Gunga Din in the eponymous 1939 film, where he dons an Indian accent and wears traditional Indian clothing in addition to coloring his skin. Jaffe’s character is satirized by other characters, simply cast-off as a comic prop to entertain the British soldiers in the film as well as western audiences.

His best known roles are “Foreign Guy” in Because I Said So (2007), the foolish, thick-accented Gupta from “Outsourced” (2010-11), and Dr. Shah in The First Session (2015) (IMDb). Cheena, using some kind of ethnic prop such as an accent or traditional clothing, is forced into assuming these un-dynamic, unrepresentative roles because they are the only ones offered to him.

In Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia (2013), the definition of “brownface” reads: “brownface refers to the racist, stereotypical caricatures of Latinos in American culture, particularly in the media” (Cortés 368). Although the encyclopedia also discusses blackfacing, yellowfacing, and redfacing, the text excludes the involvement of Asians, Pacific Islanders, and other races incorporated in the act of brownfacing.


Cf. Marie-Claire Foblets’ and Alison Renteln’s Multicultural Jurisprudence: Comparative Perspectives on the Cultural Defense (2009) on the argument that lian (face) and mianzi (image) are essential to the Chinese self-concept and that a ‘loss of face’ is detrimental to self-identity, pp. 251-7. A similar, more literal concept can be applied here.

Brownfacing is a topic that has been addressed in critical race and ethnic studies departments (Chicano and South Asian studies) as well as in film and performance studies, whether it be by reading different instances of brownface performance or discussing its antiquated role in film and television outlets. However, a link between the “othering” of India’s caste system and the “othering” of casting remains to be made through a comparison of western and caste-Hindu societies’ stereotypes of the Other. This is my prime focus. My argument traces the trajectory between Indian caste and Hollywood casting, ascertaining the epidermal similarities between the two and, at the same time, underscoring their range of differences. Scholars Prem Chowdhry and Shilpa Davé offer important historical and theoretical information on Gunga Din and brownfacing in American, Indian, and European cinematic domains, respectively, but do not explicitly reflect on the entwining of both in representation of South Asian (loss of) face and identity. I do not mean that Chowdhry and Davé avoid this reflection, but that they orient their research in ways that tend to circumvent the topic of caste-Hindu society and filmic casting.

Prem Chowdhry’s Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema (2000) discusses Gunga Din and how Hollywood and the British Empire shaped colonial attitudes. His text, like Anand’s Untouchable, allows a perspective that aligns with my own work: a focus on the colonized rather than on the colonizers. University of Virginia Professor Shilpa Davé’s Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film (2013) aligns ideas of “brown voice,” accent, and brownface with examples drawn from film and popular culture to show how Indian racialization depicts class differences and racial privilege. My own research pushes the bounds of Davé’s research by linking brownness to an extension of the caste
system through the use of skin as a prop that not only emulates categorization of the “other,” but also creates tensions in identity.

**The Then and Now of the Caste System**

Before diving into the novel and film, it is important to examine the desideratum concept of the caste system and its categorization of the “other.” Many of those who know about social stratification in India presume it emerged during Britain’s rule over India. Although the British Raj (1858 to 1947) intensified the caste system and created tensions in Dalit and national identity, its socio-historical origins lie much earlier: in the Vedic period of Ancient India when Indo-Aryans, or Indo-Europeans, invaded the northern lands of the country (Dirks). Lasting from 1500 to 600 B.C., the Vedic age is named after the *Vedas*—the canonical Hindu scriptures established by the Aryans, which include the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. Just as the Aryans laid foundations of Vedic hymns, Sanskrit literature, and Hinduism through the four Vedas, they also instituted the stratifying culture of the caste system through four distinct categories of classes. Because the Indo-Aryans\(^7\) stressed racial purity, class divisions were centered around skin color (Pruthi). The dark-skinned natives, were either included or excluded from the community structure based on their profession. Thus, people with fair, wheatish, and dark skin were incorporated into the traditional tribal community structure into one of four classes.

In order of the “noble,” highest-ranking caste to the native, lowest-ranking caste, the varna system consists of: *Brahmins* (priests, scholars), *Kshatriyas* (warriors, kings, governors), *Vaisyas* (artisans, farmers, landholders, merchants), and *Sudras* (servants, laborers, and serfs that serve the other three varnas). Because varna denotes color, each caste was represented with a

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\(^7\) In Sanskrit, Aryan means “noble.”
distinct color. Since the Aryans were fair-skinned and placed emphasis on purity, the Brahmins are represented with the color white. The Kshatriyas are represented with red, Vaisyas with yellow, and the Sudras with black to stigmatize the dark-skinned locals (Hopkins 18).

There is another class of individuals, a fifth caste that ranks below the Sudras: the Dalits. I use the words “fifth” and “caste” loosely because the Dalit class is ostracized from the varna system, seen as too lowly to be considered in the same category as the other castes. “The word ‘Dalit’ comes from the Sanskrit root dal- and means ‘broken, ground-down, downtrodden, or oppressed’” (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights). The term was first used in a journal entry in 1931 and elucidated on in social reformer B. R. Ambedkar’s Annihilation of Caste (1936) and The Untouchables: Who were They and Why They Became Untouchables? (1948) (NCDHR; Michael 2). They are cast aside, “considered impure and polluting and are therefore physically and socially excluded and isolated from the rest of society” (NCDHR). They perform undesirable, unclean work such as removing excrement, corpses, and dirt from public latrines, scavengers, and streets.

Because people from other castes do not wish to associate with Dalits, many are still excluded from the caste system with the label “untouchable”—they are forbidden from touching or being touched by members of other castes, from being literate or attending school, and from entering public or religious areas (Pruthi 167-85). If a member of the Dalit class happens to mistakenly make physical contact with a member of another caste—even a slight graze of the hand—they risk the possibility of being beaten with objects and verbally berated because the other individual would have to bathe in order to wash away the Dalit’s filthiness. Dalits’ lives
revolve around exclusion, to the extent that they cannot bathe in the Gunga\(^8\) or directly purchase store items in order to avoid desecrating persons of higher-castes with their presence (Hutton 78-80).

The Dalit’s occupation, based on Vedic Hindu traditionalism, labels Dalits not only as impure, but also as people who are fulfilling their destiny based on the cycle of karmic reincarnation. It is generally assumed by Hindus that Dalits are born into an oppressed family to do penance for past wrong-doings in attempts to appease their ancestors and gods. So in the justification of Hindu ritualization and hereditary birth-right,\(^9\) many people turn a blind eye and cast aside upwards of 166,635,700 Dalits (International Dalit Solitary Network). They are the marginalized, oppressed “Other” with no place in society because they are untouchable outcastes—their entire lives condemned and predetermined, revolving around caste and color.

**The Invisible Space Between Caste and Color in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable***

This section, using the historical background introduced in the last section, foregrounds the cast aside presence of Dalits who constantly deal with issues of color through a close reading of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*. Three years before Anand published *Untouchable* in 1935, pacifist activist Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi began his first anti-untouchability hunger strike while held in a cell at Yerwada Central Jail in Pune, Maharashtra. The fast, one of four performed solely for the anti-untouchability cause between 1932 to 1934, was undertaken by the Mahatma\(^10\) as a political strategy in hopes of preventing British establishment of an Indian

\(^8\) Also referred to as the Ganga or Ganges River, where millions of Indians bathe each year to cleanse their bodies and purify their souls. There may be a correlation between the Gunga river and to Gunga Din, but I was unable to locate any verifiable proof of this.

\(^9\) The Bhagavad Gita states: *Brāhma-ksatriya-viśāṁ śudrāṁ ca parantapa karmāṇi pravibhaktāṁ svabhāva-prabhavār gunaiḥ*, which translates to “O Arjuna, the activities of the brahmanas, kṣatriyas, vaisyas, and sudras are clearly divided according to the qualities born of their own nature” (Gita XVIII:41, trans. Singh).

\(^10\) Mahatma is a title of respect meaning “great soul” in Sanskrit.
constitution separating the electorate by caste. He stood in solidarity with the plight of Dalits, even renaming the group “Harijan,” meaning “children of God.” (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights).

Gandhi’s hunger strikes and shift in rhetorical framework provides historical context for Anand’s day-in-the-life account of a Dalit protagonist. Bakha, a public latrine cleaner, after being verbally berated by higher-caste members throughout the narrative, attends Gandhi’s lecture to hear his public declaration condemning the Hindu varna system. Animated by Gandhi’s resistance movements, Anand challenges caste segregation in the non-violent manner he knew best: by giving voice to the silenced Dalits through storytelling.\(^\text{11}\) Most reprint editions of Untouchable state on the acknowledgment page, “The original edition of this novel was dedicated to Edith Young. In this edition I add the names of Perspirer K. S. Shelvankar and Inspirer Mahatma Gandhi” (Anand 1, emphasis mine). Nearly thirty-two years after Untouchable was published in English and translated into upwards of twenty languages, Anand’s essay “The Story of My Experiments with a White Lie”\(^\text{12}\) (1967) provides insight into the author’s motivations on writing the novel after leaving it “on a large dusty table” as a part of his “work in progress” for a few years, his personal interaction with Gandhi in 1927 who allegedly\(^\text{13}\) read and revised the first draft of Untouchable, and Anand’s struggles to get the novel published (Anand, “White Lie” 32).

Anand writes that despite working five years on perfecting the novel, thinking he had “created a compact short, symbolic work with a universal significance, it was turned down by

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\(^{12}\) Cf. Rosemary George’s Indian English and the Fiction of Natural Literature (2013), pp. 127: The title “interestingly alters and echoes that of Gandhi’s autobiography (My Experiments with Truth).”

\(^{13}\) Cf. Rosemary George’s Indian English and the Fiction of Natural Literature (2013) for Saros Cowasjee’s discussion on Anand’s trip to Sabarmati Ashram in 1927 that has not been corroborated, pp. 127-130. Also see Anand’s own description of his time with Gandhi in “White Lie.”
nineteen English publishers” (Anand, WL 40). It was not until “a young English poet, Oswell Blakeston, took the book to a small publisher called Wishart Books Ltd., and brought the assurance that they would publish it provided E. M. Forster would write a preface to protect the book against being called ‘dirty’ because it dealt with dung” (Anand, WL 40). Indeed, E. M. Forster writes in the afterword: “The book seems to me indescribably clean. […] It has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it” (Anand 119). Although Anand tries cleaning the uncleanable, making the invisible visible, and transforming the allegedly impure to be pure, it is Forster’s authority that ultimately validates the novel. Similarly, many scholars object to treating Anand as a Dalit writer or the novel as representative of Dalit experience because of Anand’s non-Dalit identity, developed socioeconomic class, and higher education level (Verma; Asnani). My intention here is not to depict Anand as a Dalit writer or the novel as representative of Dalit experience, but to show the connection between caste and casting by the color depicted through Anand’s Dalit protagonist, Bakha.

Anand trudged on, not dwelling on the text’s initial rejection, the qualification of his text by Forster, or the dismissive critiques that he was unrepresentative of an authentic novelist, but on the effect of the novel on literary canons and most importantly, the treatment of ostracized untouchables. Bakha’s lament to his father, “they think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt,” is a universalizing representation of caste oppression (Anand 79). Bakha is not alone in being constantly despondent and continually harassed. He is a symbol of the Dalits: the broken, down-trodden, and oppressed. Anand acknowledges the relationship between Bakha and literature, stating that “horizons have been widened, and the universal man…has become a possibility” (Anand, WL 28). He continues on the shift in novelistic representation: “All human experience has become legitimate material for treatment, so that the writer is not only concerned
with lyrical harmony in literature and art, but even deals with tragedy” (Anand, WL 28). Anand ensured that Bakha represented what others were too afraid to represent: a pure, honest depiction of those cast aside by touching the untouchable.

Gandhi’s insistence on and calls for change during the early 1900s to the British Empire and Hindus across the country spurred the circulation of Indian novels in English about Dalitism and Dalit literature, which gained more popularity in academic and public circles alike. So although “one of the first Dalit writers was Madara Chennaiah, an 11th-century cobbler-saint,” it was the “fresh crop of new writers like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav and Shankarao Kharat”\(^\text{14}\) who resurrected public consciousness to the visibly invisible, forgotten Dalits during the time of the British Raj when India’s literary canon was stifled (Rawat). Soon, Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), R. K. Narayan (1906-2001), Raja Rao (1908-2006), and Ahmad Ali (1910-1994) paved the way for Indian literature in English. Although the four authors of English language novels offer much to say about Dalitism and the injustices of the varna system, it is Anand who is attributed with leading the Indo-Anglian fiction movement. He is often described as the progenitor of the Dalit novel in English because “he deliberately chose underdogs as his protagonists…to awaken the conscience of the reader’s world over to work for the eradication of social injustice and exploitation from the society” (Agrawal XV). Through his many novels,\(^\text{15}\) from his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), to his last, *The Road* (1961), Anand

\(^\text{14}\) Cf. N. M. Aston’s *Dalit Literature and African American Literature* (2001) for discussion on Bagul, Madhav, and Kharat’s involvement in *Little Magazine*.

modernized Indian-Anglian fiction\textsuperscript{16} and the novel, socially criticizing the hierarchical varna system through “linguistic experimentation” (Agrwal XIII–XX).

After Bakha—the tragic, universal man; the “humble, oppressed under-dog that he was by birth”—accidentally touches a higher-caste man in the street because he forgot to announce “posh, posh, sweeper coming!”, Bakha thinks to himself: “For them, I am a sweeper, sweeper - untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!” (Anand 42, 48). Before publication of Untouchable, the tragedies of Dalit identity, captured here through Bakha’s emphatic rhetorical repetitions, were rarely depicted in society. According to B. R. Agrwal in Mulk Raj Anand, “His [Anand’s] [last] novel, The Road...deals with the theme of untouchability. Bhikhu is none but Bakha of Untouchable” (Agrwal 149). Untouchable is the first instance of the downtrodden, dark-skinned archetype that pervades Anand’s later work. In a narrative style similar to that of Joyce’s Ulysses (1922), Untouchable is described as his “finest and most controversial novel,” as Anand “poured vitality, fire and richness of detail that have caused him to be acclaimed as his country’s Charles Dickens as well as this century’s greatest revealer of the ‘other’ India” (Penguin Classics). He writes that there are three important things that Untouchable teaches:

that the unity of time and space were possible all in one day of the life of a character: (2) that the disturbed, restless and paranoic stream of consciousness of the people of our time could be reproduced...in some kind of direction, so as to suggest value judgements about the characters: (3) that the 19th century novel,

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Anis Shivani’s “Indo-Anglian Fiction: The New Orientalism” (2006) for discussion on how Indian-English writers engage in the “commodification of an [sic] exoticised orientalism by reinforcing westerners’ impressions of the Indian subcontinent (1). To Shivani, the antidote relies on not serving as “armchair tourism,” or “resorting to fetishized symbols of Indian culture that the westerner feels at home in” (1). Anand’s tale on color, dirt, and excrement, deemed impure by readers, fulfills Shivani’s antidotal category.
with a beginning, a middle and an end, was over, and that one could make a novel out of anything so long as there was a pattern. As E. M. Forster was to say later: ‘The story, the story—oh what is a story?’ (Anand, WL 31-2).

Thus, Anand’s method of writing about one day in the life of eighteen-year-old, unsung hero Bakha in a book that is void of chapter breaks, is sufficient in examining how pervasively color visibility and invisibility affects Bakha’s Dalit life on personal and sociopolitical levels. Anand’s depiction of India’s caste system is no longer a historical backdrop to novelistic representation, but brought to the foreground of the text. Casteism, revolving around language of color, complexion, and pigmentation, is embedded in both public rhetoric and private discourse on dark-skinned Dalits being synonymous with impurity, disgust, pollution, and dirtiness.

The alienating discrimination of Dalit “othering” is depicted in the opening sentence of the novel: “The outcastes’ 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” (Anand 3). Anand both pronounces the literal separation of inhabitation between the different castes and methodically intertwines caste and cast, showing how they are cast aside (out + cast + caste = outcaste). Anand is unafraid of being candid, telling and showing the authentic injustice of Bakha’s circumstances and by extension, all outcastes. He is relentlessly explicit, giving vivid descriptions of sights and smells while narrating the opening sequence’s setting: “a brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines…the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows, and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes, and the biting, choking, pungent fumes that oozed from its sides” (Anand 3). This sentence, the second of the novel, gives a snapshot of Bakha’s reality by focusing on sensory
images. The novel is an unaltered day with minimal authorial interventions. Without chapters, there is no break or rupture in content. The changing of public scenes or spaces, whether at the latrine, slums, street, or compound takes readers through a panorama of Dalit experience.

In addition to focusing on sensory images, Anand confronts caste through body, color, and the physical adornment of European fashion—or what Bakha alternatively spells and calls the “fashun” of the sahibs he wishes to emulate. Anand writes that Bakha “wrinkled his dark face with the feeling of pain that came up into his being and made his otherwise handsome features look knotted and ugly” (Anand 6). Anand interlaces caste with being cast aside, toying with the connection between the narrator and implied reader. He differentiates between what came “into” his being with the suffering placed onto him as Bakha’s dark features and wretched existence make him come to terms with reality.

Indian historian and Gandhian scholar Ramachandra Guha, in the newest edition of Untouchable (2014), writes in the foreword that just as varna (caste/color/colonized) is synonymous with purity, Europe and—by extension—European fashion is synonymous with modernity (Anand XI). Bakha, one of the untouchable “others” in Hindu society bemoans his destiny, instead wishing he was born into a role preordained to be treated like a human, trying to find his answer in “fashun.” By masquerading himself in European clothing, Bakha hopes to exempt himself from the predestined misery of Dalitism: “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

17 Sahib means “master” or “owner” in Arabic. In India, the word is used as a title to show respect towards a superior man. In the context of Untouchable, Bakha uses “sahib” mainly to address British soldiers and also men of higher-castes—a rhetorical way of addressing his low status in society.
circumstances” (Anand 5). Again, Bakha does not stand alone, but as a representation of all outcastes:

Bakha’s desire is not exceptional. For, in this cantonment town, dominated by well-dressed soldiers, white and brown, “[t]he consciousness of every child was full of a desire to wear Western dress, and since most of the boys about the place were the sons of babus, bandsmen, sepoys, sweepers, washermen and shopkeepers, all too poor to afford the luxury of a complete European outfit, they eagerly stretched their hands to seize any particular article they could see anywhere, feeling that the possession of something European was better than the possession of nothing European” (Guha xi, Anand 87).

Bakha knew that “except for his English clothes there was nothing English in his life” (Anand 6). He did not care when his friends called him “Pilpali sahib,” meaning “imitation sahib” (Anand 6). Nor did he mind his father’s anger when Bakha spent all of his hard-earned money on the “clear-cut styles of European dress” (Anand 4). Even though the “goras (white men) call them kala log zamin par hagne wala (black man, you who relieve yourself on the ground),” Bakha yields (Anand 12). His deep-rooted inferiority, Anand contends, must be depicted because there is no instant path to freedom. Surjit S. Dulai writes in “Practice Before Ideology: Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable”: “While presenting Bakha's view of the Europeans and their influence on Indians, Anand does not allow the novel to degenerate into a praise of colonialism. He shows the western presence through Bakha's eyes, himself standing at a distance from the young man's innocent perspective” (Dulai; Bhatnagar, Rajeshwar 46). The odorous, cruel world in which Bakha lives has been inhumane for centuries; the hierarchical social structure of varna is unyielding in its focus on caste, color, and now clothes.
With the end of the novel comes three possible solutions to untouchability: conversion to Christianity, Gandhian philosophy to end untouchability through education and changing of laws and rhetoric, and toilet flush technology. Anand writes of an alleged conversation with Gandhi:

“The Mahatma said: ‘The straight book is truthful and you can reform people by saying things frankly.’ I said: ‘Though I do want to reform people, I believe in posing the question rather than answering it’” (Anand, WL 40). Thus, the three resolutions of the book are intended to be more politically structural rather than a novelistic denouement. E. M. Forster wrote in a letter to Anand, “You make your sweater sympathetic yet avoid making him a hero or a martyr, and, by the appearance of Gandhi and the conversation about machinery at the end, you give the whole book a coherence and shape which it would otherwise have lacked” (Cowasjee 245). Hence, Bakha and his narrative are a personification of Dalit struggles due to varna, as his attempt to find solace is best seen through the eyes of another’s position and not in his own societal role. Anand’s emphasis on Bakha’s dark “Other” body, whether in “fashun,” distress, or foul labor, is to point out the beastly “squalor” that is unjustly perpetrated onto outcastes (Cowasjee 247).

(Re)Locating the “Other” Through Brownfacing in RKO Radio Pictures’s *Gunga Din*

Over his lifetime, Mulk Raj Anand corresponded with many people, writing thousands of letters about his life, the injustices of the caste system perpetrated onto outcastes, and British imperialism. One of the published collections, *Letters on India* (1942), contains Anand’s correspondence with British socialist Tom Brown. In one correspondence set, now titled “Imperialism—The Original Sin,” Tom Brown writes to Anand: “I don’t understand the exact position in India. Has English rule helped or hindered the growth of India as a nation? And what about the various religions and communities?” (Letter 16). To Anand, questions such as these

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18 This letter is included in a 2007 Pearson Longman Study Edition of *Untouchable* that includes an introduction, annotations, and critical essays. See Saros Cowasjee’s essay “The Epic of Misery.”
were an effort of the colonizers to exploit the religious, class, and caste differences of the colonized. Anand responds with: “The main problem of the Indian people is hunger. And hunger, my dear Tom, is neither Hindu nor Muhammadan\textsuperscript{19} nor Untouchable - it is just sheer bellyache!” (Letter 28). Anand’s statement implies that there is a universality in Indian experience because of colonialism, and that all people—no matter what religion or caste—should unite because, after all, to the British they are just props.

On May 5th, 1918, English author—and according to George Orwell, a “morally insensitive…jingo imperialist”—Rudyard Kipling wrote to [Lord] George Sydenham Clarke about how “people forget now, under this mass of words, [how ent]renched Caste has become: how [ ]\textsuperscript{20} continue; how [ ] touch with the India of today” (Orwell 184; Kipling, Pinney 494). Kipling’s letter is striking not only in depicting the caste system’s commonly perceived role in British imperialist history, but also as an epistolary account of a relentless social issue that plagues India. Although the missing sections cannot be featured, I speculate based on context that the words imply some type of ideological resonance of caste, implied by the words “entrenched” and “continue” in the “unaltered India of the present,” where the “high caste man, or official, grinds the faces of the poor in the sweet old way” (493). Kipling’s words reverberate throughout time with the continued presence of scheduled-caste, accentuating the differences between native, subordinate, and untouchable “Others” with their British counterparts.

In 1892, a few decades before Kipling wrote this letter on the problems of caste discrimination, he published “Gunga Din.” The poem is about an Indian regimental water-bearer

\textsuperscript{19} A term previously used instead of the now common term “Muslim.” Whereas “Muhammadan” may not be entirely offensive, the word is now seen as a misnomer because it implies that people of the Islamic faith follow the will of Muhammad (prophet) instead the will of Allah (God).
\textsuperscript{20} “The lower third of this leaf of the letter has been cut away for the signature, taking away about ten lines on this side of the leaf and the bracketed parts of the two lines above the missing section” (Kipling, Pinney 493).
(bhīṣṭi) who obeys the orders of English soldiers, giving them water from his “goatskin water-bag” (Kipling 22). In the end, Din saves one of the soldiers that has “belted and flayed” him, just as a “bullet come an’ drilled the beggar [Gunga Din] clean” (Kipling 22, 72). Gunga’s final words to the British soldier are, “I ‘ope you liked your drink”’ (Kipling 75). The last few lines of the poem are the lamenting voice of the soldier, emphatically repeating the loyal bhisti’s name: “An’ I’ll get a swig in hell from Gunga Din / Yes, Din! Din! Din!” (Kipling 81-2).

Although the last line of the poem reads, “You’re a better man than I am, Gunga Din!”, the poem reflects British imperialist attitudes and racial superiority with an Indian man serving British soldiers despite their cruel treatment of him.

Over the course of the poem, readers learn that although the bhīṣṭi Gunga Din, described as a “limpin’ lump o’ brick-dust” and a “squidgy-nosed old idol,” is beaten and berated, the narrator describes Gunga as the “finest” of the “blackfaced crew” (Kipling 10-8). The British soldier’s phenotypical description of the dark-skinned Indians is later diametrically contrasted with a description of Gunga’s character. The poem reads, “An’ for all ‘is dirty ‘ide / ‘E was white, clear white, inside” (Kipling 45-6). The narrator places this inner fairness as the water-bearer’s redeeming quality; it is the purifying color of loyalty that allows him to be the “better man.” The focus on interdependent dualities, dark signifying bad and light signifying good, alongside Kipling’s letter in 1918 speaks to a prejudiced, stereotypical viewpoint of “white” being synonymous with western/wealthy, much like the white sahibs of Untouchable.

The poem “Gunga Din” and its titular character were an inspiration for a film of the same name, released to American and European audiences in 1939 by RKO Radio Pictures. Although RKO acquired rights to “Gunga Din” and other literary properties in 1936, the film idea sat on the shelf for two years, similar to Anand’s Untouchable. Finally, in 1938, director George
Stevens undertook the project with screenplay writers Joel Sayre and Fred Guiol. The film turned out to be a huge success despite massive production costs of nearly $2 million, as “its gross earnings [were] well over $3 million in its first year” (Chapman). As one of the most popular adventure films to come out of Hollywood, *Gunga Din* fuses the water-carrier narrative from Kipling’s “Gunga Din” with his *Soldiers Three*, a collection of short stories about three British soldiers published in 1888.

The film, much like the poem, depicts a dark-skinned *bhisti* character; although, Gunga Din’s role is cast aside, much smaller in comparison to the white men (for a visual illustration of his miniscule role, see fig. 1). The film, instead, focuses on three British soldiers—Sergeant McCheshney, Sergeant Thomas Ballentine, and Sergeant Archibald Cutter—played by Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr., respectively. The soldiers venture to the fictional village of Tantrapur for one last mission before Sergeant Ballentine leaves the ranks to get married. There, audiences are introduced to the native water-bearer Gunga Din, played by Russian-Jewish American actor Sam Jaffe in brownface. Din’s wish throughout the film is to become a bugler of the British army, as he remains loyal to the soldiers despite their constant denigrating mockery of him.

One night, Din tells Sergeant Cutter about a sacred temple made out of gold in hopes of improving his chances of becoming an honorary soldier for the British empire. “Din see it. All gold,” he says in third person (*GD*). Cutter responds with, “There’s a gold temple waiting to be cut up and taken away in a wheelbarrow” (*GD*). He even poses the abhorrent question: “What if I

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21 “Soldiers Three” was also adapted into a movie in 1951.
22 The film was set in California. The technical advisor for *Gunga Din*, was a seventy-year-old retired British Officer, Sir Robert Holland, “whose chief qualifications for being an expert on Indian culture and customs is that he was for a long time a member of the high-born services in India, one of our rulers” (Abbas 31).
was to sneak away and blow up the Taj Mahal or a sacred tomb?” (GD). Din and Cutter make their way to the gold temple and are faced with the uprising Thuggee murder cult that, according to Sergeant MacChesney, murders 30 thousand people per year.23 The main leader—who the Thuggees call “Guruji,”24 played by Italian actor Eduardo Ciannelli in brownface—takes Cutter hostage. He gives a passionate speech about his father, “their fathers…[and] their fathers before them” and how they have been “kicked, spat upon, and led to the hills like wild things” (GD). He says that worshiping is his destiny, and that they must “kill, kill, kill” to preserve their beliefs before the white man (GD). Guruji soon commits suicide by jumping into a torture pit of snakes, his last words being, “India is my faith and my country and I can die for it just like you can for yours. India, farewell” (GD). Meanwhile, Din joins the fight and is mortally wounded by a member of the Thuggee cult. Although he is bleeding profusely, Din crawls over to the bugle and says his famous last words: “The colonel’s got to know” (GD). He heroically climbs to the top of the temple and plays the bugle to sound off a rescue battalion heading into a Thuggee ambush; he continues playing even after being shot six times by cult members.25 Din receives a proper army funeral procession, as the Colonel remarks “And here’s a man of whom the regiment will always be proud” and reads the last stanza of Kipling’s poem (GD). The last scene shows a superimposed camera shot of Din donned in full army attire, smiling and saluting the audience with a background of a horizon at dawn.

23 This cult believed in the goddess Kali, which means “dark” in Sanskrit and Hindi. “Kali’s blackness is symbolic of eternal darkness and which has the potential to both destroy and create” (Ancient History Encyclopedia). In art, Kali is most often portrayed with blue skin instead of black in part because of the stigma associated with dark skin.
24 A title of respect, similar to that of Mahatma.
25 Later, this scene is spoofed at the beginning of The Party (1968), in which Peter Sellers dons brownface makeup and plays a thick-accented, comedic, and foolish Indian actor Hrundi V. Bakshi.
Historian Rudy Behlmer speaks of *Gunga Din*’s reception in India and America: “*Gunga Din* did exceptionally well abroad as well as in this country, but was banned in India for its obvious imperialistic attitudes and presentation” (Behlmer). Set in the nineteenth century when Britain ruled India, *Gunga Din* is one of the precursor examples of brownface performance. Jaffe covered himself in brown makeup (see fig. 2), wore a traditional Indian outfit (*dhoti*), and spoke with an Indian accent. Since this movie was shot many decades ago, some viewers excuse the racist elements—or ethnic props—of Jaffe’s role in the film, claiming that the racial differences are simply precursors of locating contemporary South Asian actors, but Davé contends that “brownface performance is how Americans want natives to act and has more to do with the dominant group and how the minority group fits into the dominant narrative” (Davé 28). Behlmer explains that there was a brief effort to cast an Indian actor for *Gunga Din*. Sabu Dastagir—normally credited by only his first name—was famous for being the only recurring Indian actor during the cinema’s classical period in Britain and America. Although Sabu seemed the “logical choice for Gunga Din,” producer Alexander Korda “did not want to lend him at that time as he was preparing for *The Thief in Baghdad*” (Behlmer, emphasis mine). “Then there was an attempt to find an unknown Indian player for the role,” but the film crew decided against it, perhaps to ensure the film’s success for western audiences (Behlmer). Behlmer fails to discuss why filmmakers decided to neglect finding an Indian actor or why brownfacing was

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26 Scholar Prem Chowdhry contends that the antagonistic Guruji emulates Mahatma Gandhi both physically and ideologically, but in a radically negative, evil light.

27 Ironically, two of Sabu’s roles (*Elephant Boy* in 1937 and *Jungle Book* in 1942) were based on Kipling stories. See *Sabu* (2014) for more information on the actor.

28 Cf. to recent statements by *Exodus: Gods and King* (2014) director Ridley Scott when he told *Variety Magazine* he cannot mount a $140 million film and say: “my lead actor is Mohammed so-and-so from such-and-such. I’m just not going to get it financed!” (Last Week Tonight with John Oliver). See: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/en/story/last-week-tonighthollywoodwhitewashing_us_56cdf08de4b0928f5a6e07ac>. 
the best alternative, other than saying Jaffe was a “ridiculous piece of casting” (Behlmer). When Jaffe was cast, “he was told to think like Sabu…and he played the role how he thought Sabu would play the role” (Behlmer). Blogger Matthew Dessum writes: “By the way, ever wonder why they cast Sam Jaffe in brownface to play the eponymous water-bearer? Sabu wasn’t available. No, I'm not kidding—he really was the go-to guy for Indian stereotypes” (Dessem).

The film’s use of brownface (identity placed onto Sam Jaffe) and his “indelible” execution of Gunga Din (identity put into Gunga Din), is a revival of Dalit identity conflicts (Behlmer). Like Bakha, Jaffe and Din wish to occupy a role that is not naturally theirs—a South Asian character and a British regimental soldier. Whereas Bakha’s problem of identity is complicated through being discarded due to darkness and “fashun,” Din’s are through his aspirations of becoming a British regimental soldier. Bakha finds solace in “fashun,” pretending to be European in his European dress, and Gunga is happiest after death when we see a superimposed image of him in proper British military uniform, smiling and saluting audiences everywhere. His white to brown transition is a way to provide comic relief and amusement, but to Bakha the adoration of western attire—or brown to white—is a way to escape misery.

There are two levels to the casting of Gunga Din: the exchange of being (Jaffe → western → white) to representing (Gunga → Indian → brown). And much like Gunga and Bakha have two tiers of identity, the film’s South Asian roles are also dichotomous. On one hand, there is the dim-witted, loyal, comic figure (Gunga) and on the other, an exoticized representation of “apes,” “torturers,” evil “savages,” and “tormenting orientals” (Thuggees) (GD). Gunga and the Thuggee cult are marginalized onto opposite ends of the spectrum, not represented dynamically or by representative actors.
Gunga Din portrays the cult as evil, feeding into westerners’ fears of the exotic. Whereas Gunga is a useless dreamer—a tasteless comic prop to twenty-first century sensibilities—members of the Thuggee cult, in the “remote splendor and exotic terrain…somewhere in the middle of nowhere,” ominously chant “Kali” and “Kali ma ki jai (long live Mother Kali)” throughout the film (Behlmer; GD). The emphatic repetitions of “Kali,” like Bakha’s repetitions of “untouchable,” help sustain a collective identity for the cult members. Often, the British soldiers snarl at the men’s prayers and retort with negative comments, like calling Kali the “goddess of blood” (GD). Although the movie begins with the following disclaimer, “Those portions of this picture dealing with the worship of the Goddess Kali are based on historic fact,” RKO Pictures’s due diligence is inadequate. N. M. Durant, a manager of RKO’s office in Calcutta wrote a letter²⁹ to RKO executives in December, 1939 explaining that Kali is not a murderous goddess, let alone exclusive to Thuggery as the movie seems to portray:

Kali is a Hindu goddess and is commonly known as the Destroyer. Thus on the eve of a marauding expedition, we might expect Thugs to worship Kali to gain strength for their enterprise, but to depict the goddess as being the peculiar deity of Thuggery is not only misleading, but likely to give offense to all orthodox Hindus. Kali is the Mother goddess and as such is as real and reverenced by all good Hindus as much as the Virgin Mary is revered by Catholic Christians (Durant; Behlmer).

Kali, meaning “black,” (see footnote 27), inadvertently deals with the stigma associated with the changing of skin. In art and culture, Kali is bluefaced, depicted with blue skin instead of black.

²⁹ I was unable to locate a copy of the letter other than from Behlmer’s “Behind the Scenes” voiceover of Gunga Din. Also, Behlmer notes that Durant also speaks to the whole idea of British soldiers looting a temple as bad form.
Similar to brownfacing and the caste system, Kali’s imprecise illustration in the film is blasphemous.

In addition to Kali, both Bakha and Gunga are treated poorly. The treatment of white to brown and brown to brown is similar in both texts. Other characters in *Untouchable*—people of higher castes or the British soldiers Bakha briefly interacts with—treat him by ignoring his suffering due to being an outcaste. Similarly, Din is seen as a joke by the whites and the only other “Indians” in the film, members of the Thuggee cult, see him as a traitor. Film critic Khwaja Abbas writes, “All the British characters are honest, jolly souls while all the ‘natives’ are scheming, treacherous, unscrupulous devils. All but one!! The solitary exception is Gunga Din, the faithful water-carrier—loyal unto death…but the sacrifice of Gunga Din as sublimated by Kipling, was not the sacrifice of a friend, an equal, but that of a faithful [sic] servant” (Abbas 26).

**Culmination**

The orientalist view of seeing Gunga Din as nothing more than a “faithful servant” is repositioned in *Bombay Chronicle* film critic Khwaja Abbas’s provoking question at the end of “*Gunga Din: Another Scandously Anti-Indian Picture*” (see fig. 3-4), asking [sic] “What are we doing to do about it?” (Abbas 31). Although Abbas did not receive a galvanizing effect at the time he posed the question, his 1939 article elicited eye-opening rhetoric for Indian readers on the plight of those marginalized in Hollywood. The issue of silenced South Asian identity through brownface performance was brought to the foreground of Indian and western film viewership.

Like Abbas’s article, Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, and Mulk Raj Anand’s weapons of speaking for the cast aside—whether it be public oration or the use of language—speak to
different sociocultural audiences by providing an unprecedented view of the colonized rather than the colonizers. Bakha from Mulk Raj Anand’s social-realist novel *Untouchable* (1935) as well as Sabu and other Indian actors neglected from involvement in RKO Radio Pictures’s orientalist *Gunga Din* (1939) are marginalized outcastes. They are merely exotic natives subordinated by hierarchical stratifications. Prem Chowdhry’s codes of analogies, western/white and colonized/color, are visual decipherments of the varna system and Hollywood casting, showing how racial and cultural props negatively affect South Asian identity.

My method of structural homology, comparing *Untouchable* to *Gunga Din* to display dualities of light/dark, white/brown, and colorism/color-consciousness, is imbued with earlier socio-histories of Aryan invasions that led to the caste system’s strictures and British colonial narratives that heightened issues of cast(e)-ing. Non-Indians in South Asian roles vex South Asian journeys to collective and self identity. Unrepresentative characters played by unrepresentative actors, as seen in Sam Jaffe’s brownface performance of *Gunga Din*, are participants in a demeaning, excessive form of racial caricaturing. The cultural mimicry of different skin tone, accent, and traditional garment play a role in the movie’s description as “Imperialist propaganda of the crudest, most vulgar sort” (Abbas 26). The depictions of Indians as “sadistic barbarians” vilifies India and reduces its cultures and customs into something that could be mocked or reviled (Abbas 27).

*Untouchable* received disgusted reviews by western critics, but Anand knew he needed to provide an uninterrupted, honest view of Dalitism, much like the context of a film. His chapterless novel does just this. Bakha’s tale, universal to other Dalits, touches those who were previously untouchable. It is with Anand’s *Untouchable* and RKO’s *Gunga Din* that I am able to push conversations in South Asian academic fields to address important questions regarding
caste, color, and change. Remnants of caste in casting can be seen through hyperbolized
othering: the marginalization of a group of South Asians—whether it be by people of the same
ethnic group or not.

Drawing on Bakha as a fictional icon for social-realist change, this project ends with the
possibility of hope for the future. As Gandhi says during his public declaration while the “brown
and black faces below him [Bakha] were full of a stilled rapture”: “We must recognize an
equality of rights, of privileges and opportunities for everyone,” whether it be within caste or
casting realms (Anand 128, 137).
### Appendix

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Table 1. “Percentage of Households with Amenities in India, 2001 and 2011” (PRB). The original sources are the 2001 and 2011 India Censuses, but the compilation of the information into this table can be found on the Population Reference Bureau Organization website.

Fig. 1. A promotion poster for *Gunga Din* when it first released in 1939. This is one of the only promotion images that includes the eponymous, *bhista* character. Here, he is seen in a comedic pose with his hand over his head while the soldiers are heroically posed, much larger and on top.
Fig. 2. This collection of images showcases Sam Jaffe’s transition from white to brown. Source unknown.

“Gunga Din” Another Scandalously Anti—Indian Picture! Indians Portrayed as Sadistic Barbarians!

American Ingenuity Provides an Apology for British Imperialism.

Indians No Better than Dogs?

By KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS

(Originally written for *The Bombay Chronicle*)

(The following piece is a riposte to the article written by the South African journalist, W.E. Henning, under the title “Gunga Din,” which was published in the Bombay Chronicle of October 13, 1939. Henning was the first to cast doubt on the accuracy of the story of how the British army took the initiative to rescue a group of Indians from the hand of their own countrymen. The following is an excerpt from the article written by Khwaaja Ahmad Abbas, a film critic for the Bombay Chronicle, who refutes Henning’s allegations.)

Fig. 3. February, 1939; film critic Khwaaja Ahmad Abbas for the Bombay Chronicle wrote for Film India.
Fig. 4. A continuation of the article. The bottom is an extract from the original Hollywood studio. The last line reads, “It speaks for itself. ‘Indians’ means ‘Thugs’ who believe in murder as religion.”
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