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Between Untouchable and The Bachelor of Arts there is a world of difference in the basic situations of the main characters. One is an uneducated street sweeper and the other is a University graduate, and both have a different conception of the British. However, there is also a common thread that unites the two novels in the main characters conclusionary acceptance of the “home”/India over the “world”/England. Thus, although different values are assigned to the importance of British colonialism within the texts, in the end each novel comes to a stand wherein Indian culture is favored over the British.

In Untouchable, the main character is a devout worshiper of the British way of life, however, his idolatry of them is “naïve” (78). On the very first page of the novel it is written that Bakha has been “caught by the glamour of the ‘white man’s’ life,” (9). It is as if he was a little fish hooked by a tasty looking morsel. Not only does this dehumanize Bakha, but it consigns him to a position of naiveté. He is always going to be the one looking in on something he cannot have. The “glamour” that has seduced him is only a contrast to his own reality of cleaning toilets and eating bread from the gutters. Bakha is in this way both naïve and childish, because the language used to portray him gives him only the intellectual powers of a child in determining between two modes of existence and he, naively knowing no better, chooses the one that seems more glamorous. In his efforts to live the British life all Bakha could do was don their clothing; this to him is the height of the glamour.

Instead of being obsessed by English clothing, the main character of The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran, is fixated on British literature. This is a step up from childish thinking to that of intellectual equal with the colonial powers. However, Chandran is still a trifle immature in his approach because he believed that “the book should be enjoyable, and he ruthlessly shut books
that threatened to bore him” (94). In his post-college reading career, Chandran’s tendencies to read what his teachers considered “trash” (237) escalated because he read for personal enjoyment only. In a way, therefore, even though the subject matter of books is more mature than that of fashion, in his accession of it, Chandran echoes Bakha’s own puerile approach to British culture.

The English language usage in *Untouchable* provides a measurement of how well Bakha comprehends the British. By pigeonizing a few English words, Bakha and his friends are once again only touching on part of the British way of life. They concern themselves only with those items that have glamour to them, “fashun” (34), “gentlemen” (34), and “Jernal” (93), for example, are three of their “English” words. In Bakha’s case, the burning desire to become a “gentreman” forged within him a desire to dress, act, and most importantly, talk like one of the sahibs. When he asks the babu ji to give him lessons, Bakha’s is attempting to fulfill his dream to eventually become one of the sahibs (39-40). In contrast to this Gauri Viswanathan wrote that “with the spread of education the tendency of familiarity was to lessen wonder” (143). So perhaps if the reader had been allowed to follow Bakha as he learned the language we would have seen him slowly become disillusioned with the British.

Certainly Chandran can be seen as having become discontented with the British after his education. In *the Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran has feelings of antagonism towards the British president of the university, and by extension to all British citizens in India:

> [Professor Brown] is here not out of love for us, but merely to keep up appearances. All Europeans are like this. They will take their thousand or more a month, but won’t do the slightest service to Indians with a sincere heart... Why should not these fellows admit Indians to their clubs? Sheer colour arrogance... Anyway who invited them here? (19-20)

Within this one paragraph, Chandran displays a dramatic shift in the power distinction between the British and Indians. If what Viswanathan wrote was questioned, this quote is conviction that
from his education Chandran ceased to respect the British as Bakha does in his ignorance. Chandran even takes it one step further with the closing statement, “Anyway who invited them here?” This is an astounding change from Bakha who cannot get enough of the British. For Chandran, the identity of India is being established in opposition to Britain, whereas for Bakha, identity is conceived only in terms of how close one can become to being British.

The preceding sentence should be modified to state that this theory of identity as it relates to Bakha, is only true for how we have seen Bakha thus far in the novel. In the closing pages of Mulk Raj Anand’s novel, Bakha undergoes a transformation in character. Instead of the simplistic dichotomy of life in the outcaste’s colony and life in the Barracks, Bakha is presented with three complex life choices. First Bakha is preached at by the missionary, next is a lecture by Gandhi, and finally he is privy to an argument about a flushing device for toilets. In his quick rejection of the missionary, Bakha displays a callous disregard for the abstract British power of religion in favor of a materialistic desire for clothing alone.

During the lecture by Gandhi, Bakha is disappointed by the unspecific and merely conceptual statements relating to outcastes. When he realizes that Gandhi will be speaking about the untouchables, Bakha questions internally, “Is [Gandhi] really going to talk about the outcastes, about us, about Chota, Ram Charan, my father and me?” (141). Bakha expects from the beginning that Gandhi’s speech will be personalized to Bakha himself because his little world is all he knows of the issue. Instead, Gandhi speaks too hypothetically and with too high of diction for Bakha to follow him. Also during Gandhi’s speech, Bakha sees a British policeman in the crown and thinks the following:

...in the midst of this enormous crowd of Indians, fired with an enthusiasm for their leader, the foreigner seemed out of place, insignificant the representative of an order that had nothing to do with the natives. (144)
In this moment Bakha’s idolization of the British armed forces suffers a heavy blow. Even though the policeman is not a military officer, (Bakha’s true idol), he still represents the physical force/presence of the British in India. Bakha’s internal thought process here is almost equivalent to Chandran’s, “Anyway who invited them here?” The difference is that Bakha is not so clearly antagonistic, he is merely beginning to notice that maybe the British don’t belong. And that, consequently, maybe the Indians have some glamour of their own that the British cannot touch.

And lastly although Bakha is fascinated by the discussion of the flushing machine, he cannot fully comprehend its function because of his lack of education. In the end, Bakha can only return home to his family in order to relate to his father, his ultimate authority figure, all that he has heard. In going home, Bakha turns away from all these options and makes a choice between the world that offers many seductions and the home which provides a refuge and a space outside of time to contemplate the exterior world.

In the case of The Bachelor of Arts, the entire book has been a course in non-decision making for Chandran. It is only at the very end of the book that Chandran makes a decision utterly on his own and immediately takes action regarding it. Earlier in the novel, Chandran has expressed opinions of his own and then rescinded them on the basis of other’s thoughts (27). Because of this, Chandran’s character had the appearance of someone who was fickle and easily influenced. It almost seems as if the novel had to end where it did because Chandran was finally mature enough to get along without the accompaniment of others/the readers even. Because we had watched him grow into adulthood, his story could end for us when he displayed his first mature decision. This first resolution is of paramount importance in how it connects to Bakha’s own final resolve to go home. For Chandran, also, intends to leave behind everything for
“home.” In the course of this novel, Chandran is supposed to travel to Europe but never does. He leaves home and becomes a *sanyasi*, thus withdrawing from the very concepts of “home” and “world,” however even from this retreat he does return home. Eventually he gets married and starts his own household for which he forms his greatest ties within the story. It is to this home, and specifically to his wife, that Chandran repairs to at the end of R.K. Narayan’s novel. In the end, Chandran chooses “home” over all his other options in life.

Even though these two novels have contradictory opinions of the British, they do have a connecting theme in the manner with which the main characters elect to live their lives at the end. In my opinion, the novels follow the maturation process of the two men, Bakha and Chandran, and at the end of each novel they have become adults who stand in as substitutes for India herself. Even as they are maturing, so is India as a whole coming to terms with what it means to be a colony and what it means to be Indian. Each of these novels offers distinct visions of what it means to be Indian, but both of them ground this identity in the notion of “home.” By relegating the decision of what is of most import to the main characters, the authors can showcase their own views on the subject as an intrinsic part of the text. Two novels by men of the same country may approach the nation’s global concerns with different modes of thought, but in the end a national consciousness of their own identity as Indians asserts itself by the way in which their fictional main characters define themselves. For the Indians, the novel form can be seen as an exploratory ground for sounding out this national consciousness and placing themselves within the greater context of the world.
List of Works Cited

